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The Revenant • The Hateful Eight • Steve Jobs • Carol • The Danish Girl

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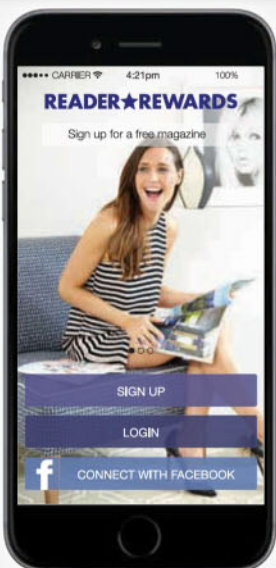
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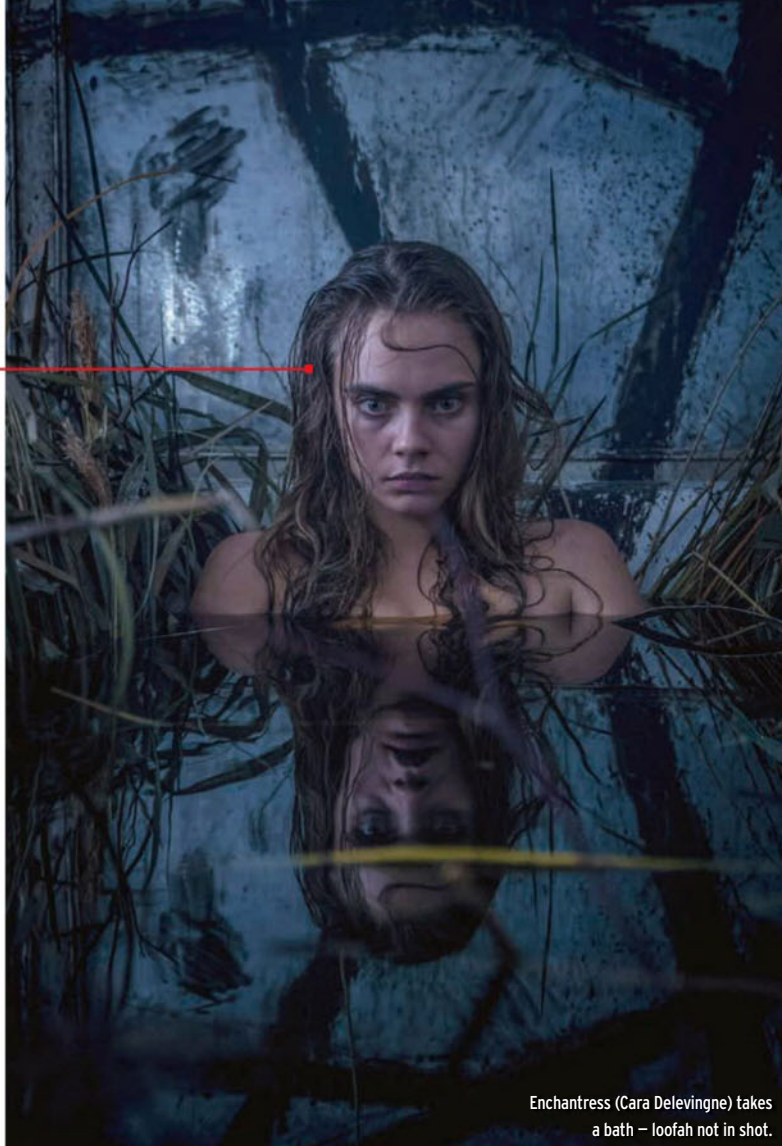
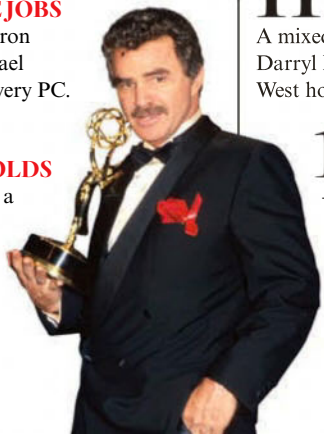
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CULT FILM CLASSICS IN THE HOUSE

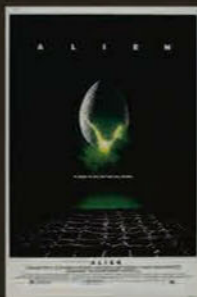
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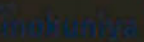


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20th May

SEASON 2 PLAYING AT BRISBANE MYER, INNALOO, AND MARION



Credits

FEBRUARY 2016

WILL HE OR WON'T HE? That's the question the team at *Empire* Towers have pondered over the duration of this issue's production. The who? Leonardo DiCaprio, who, like Burt Reynolds (check out our weekend with *The Bandit* on page 92) is one of the rare films stars who is recognised purely by a diminutive of his first name: Leo. Burt. See also: Tom. Cate. Nicole. Clint. Erm... Zac.

And what is it Leo will or will not do? Win an Oscar. We are assuming his name will be one read aloud in the shortlist on January 14, for his devastating performance in Aléjandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant*. It will be his fourth nomination for Best Actor (his sixth if you include the unclaimed noms for Best Supporting Actor in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, and a producer nod for *The Wolf Of Wall Street* Best Picture), the other three he has gone home statueless. We speak with arguably the greatest actor of his generation in *The Empire Interview*, on page 66.

As usual, the competition is fierce, in particular from Michael Fassbender, for his immersive turn as *Steve Jobs* in Danny Boyle's film of the same name (page 86). The films and performance demands couldn't be more different. *The Revenant*, a spectacular wilderness survival yarn set amid grand nature in the South Dakota wilderness (Canada doubles for the location), is terrifying and physically gruelling, and DiCaprio is silent for much of it. Meanwhile *Steve Jobs* is set almost completely indoors, an Aaron Sorkin-penned blizzard of high tension dialogue behind the scenes of signature Apple launches. Both get five stars (the former film in the last issue, the latter film in this one; In Cinemas opens on page 32).

However it pans out, we can always rely on that old staple secondary question — Who'd win in a fistfight? — and entreat both actors to duke it out in the car park afterwards, like Hollywood Golden Age leading men were wont to do. (I like Leo for the Oscar, Michael for the stoush, although it's a points decision). It's all part of our Oscars preview which begins on page 60.

As for our second split run of covers in as many months — how spicy do Margot Robbie and Jared Leto look as Harley Quinn and The Joker on these covers? About as scorching as David Ayers's "Comic Book Movie 2.0" appears. Go inside the madness of *Suicide Squad* on page 44.

Oh, and who else is pumped for *The Hateful Eight*? Quentin Tarantino returns to the frozen West this month and *Empire* spends four days on set. Check it on page 54.

Enjoy the issue, you beautiful creatures.

Dan Murphy

EDITOR
DANIEL MURPHY

MEGA-POSTER ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Turn to page 98.
- 2 Carefully extract your poster along the perforated strip.
- 3 Store thoughtfully.
- 4 Buy the next two copies of *Empire* (that's March and April) to get your remaining quarters.
- 5 Assemble using adhesive of your choice in location of choice.
- 6 Enjoy. Missed last issue's quarter? Go to www.magshop.com.au/ empire-back-issues to order our last issue online.



EMPIRE

(... and the Academy Award category that best describes us)

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Best Animated Short Film

SENIOR EDITOR **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN** 02 8114 9495

Best Visual Effects

REVIEWS EDITOR **JAMES JENNINGS** 02 8116 9310

Best Sound Mixing

ART DIRECTOR **CRAIG CARROLL** 02 8114 9433

Best Original Song

PHOTO EDITOR **BONNIE-MAREE WEIGAND** 02 8114 9444

Best Actress In A Leading Role

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BAUER MEDIA

Publisher **Ewen Page**
Publisher **Cornelia Schulze**

Empire is published in Australia by Bauer Media Action Sports Pty Limited, part of the Bauer Media Group, ACN 079 430 023, 54-58 Park Street, Sydney, New South Wales, 2000. © 2013, under licence from Bauer Consumer Media Limited. All rights reserved. The trade mark "Empire" and certain material contained herein are owned by Bauer Consumer Media. Printed by PMP Print, 31-35 Heathcote Road, Moorebank, NSW 2170, (02) 9828 1350. Distributed by Network Services, 54-58 Park Street, Sydney, NSW 2000. Empire accepts no responsibility for loss of or damage to unsolicited contributions. ISSN 2205-0183

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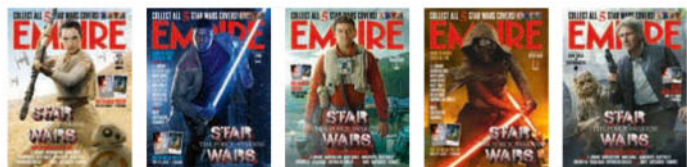
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LETTER of the MONTH



BATTY FOR POSTERS

I tried my best to win one of these must-have *Empire's Greatest Movie Posters* box-sets from you and you've left me no choice but to go and acquire one for myself. I like it so much that I've assigned Batman to stand guard over this brilliant publication. Let no hands mark these pages!

FABIAN KAHWATI, NORTHCOTE, VIC
Glad you were able to get your hands on one of the (very tall) box-sets. That must be one tall Batman you've got there.



EVERY letter printed this month scores a Blu-ray of the second series of *True Detective*, starring Colin Farrell and Rachel McAdams.

FORCE OF SATISFACTION

I went to an early Saturday morning screening of *The Force Awakens* hoping not to be disappointed, just like I was with the prequels. After negotiating my way to get a seat and enduring some annoying chatter from "excited" nerds, I waited with bated breath to absorb the J.J. Abrams treatment. I smiled when I saw the First Order Star Destroyer's outline and grinned when Kylo Ren made his first appearance. Then as the film went on, I began feeling something I haven't felt since the Chris Nolan Batman films. This feeling continued throughout the film. Just as the end credits rolled along with the music, I made my way out of the cinema and sat in my car for a minute. I deduced this overall feeling was the sense of satisfaction and that the Force had indeed awakened me. Thanks to J.J. Abrams, I now feel that same sense of satisfaction I used to feel when watching the classic trilogy on both TV and VHS all those years ago. Thank you J.J. for bringing what all us *Star Wars* tragics have been missing: satisfaction. The Force is telling me to go see it again soon, so I might just do that.

BORIS VINCE, VIA EMAIL

We'll pass on your thanks to J.J.... as soon as he returns our incessant calls.

WARS, NOT PEACE

I love all the hype that surrounds *Star Wars*. It's such an amazing, trail-blazing story and every film in the series has become an instant classic. Love the fact that there is now a 2015 addition to this franchise. I hope *Star Wars* continues to grace our films for years – these are the Wars where film fans win every time.

CAROL NATHANIEL, LANE COVE, NSW

Star Wars films are planned every year until 2020 (thus far), so the Wars will rage on for the foreseeable future...

FEEL THE (POLICE) FORCE

I subscribe to *Empire* because the title is obviously a *Star Wars* reference and when I read a magazine about movies then it better be about *Star Wars* movies or else I'm really not interested. What great covers on issue #178. I collected them all and had to get two of each because, obviously, one copy of each is sealed in carbonite (poly bags) while I give in to the dark side and read the other one. I don't really read but I do like the *Star Wars* pictures. And what great pictures of *Star Wars* you have, although you could have more if you really wanted to keep this reader happy. To be honest, I was a bit shocked to see that there are other movies being released. When I saw photos that weren't from *Star Wars* I read the words and found that there are all kinds of movies coming out. I have no idea why anyone would watch something that isn't *Star Wars*. Although, I guess superheroes are okay if we are waiting for the next *Star Wars*. I just wanted to write to say that out of all the *Star Wars* magazines I steal, yours is my favourite. May the Force be with you.

KVT, VIA EMAIL

Thanks KVT! Also, we've sent your details to the police. May the 'Force' be with you, eh?

YOUR BEAUTY IS UGLY!

I remember when *Empire* first came out (or rather the second issue). I marvelled at its love and passion for cinema and could not wait for the next issue to be delivered to my house. Then laziness crept in and filler became de rigueur. *American Beauty* at 16 is so random and pointless (issue #177). Yes it is a well crafted film and very much of its time thematically but the whole world has developed an obsession with the "anniversary". At least when bands



TWEET US!

@JohnBoyega
 looking like a
 badass on the
 latest @
 EmpireAust
 #cantwait
 Victoria Leane
 @StormyPOP



Sorry #StarWars
 newbies but I
 picked Han &
 Chewie cover cos
 HOW COULD I
 NOT?! lol.
 MurrayChristmas!
 @bigmuzzAUS

SPINE QUOTE
HONOUR ROLE

#178

"Sand is
overrated..."

THE FILM

Eternal Sunshine...
(2004)

THE CONNECTION

Rey cover: she's
on a sand planet."Dude, you're my
new hero."

THE FILM

Man Of The House
(2005)

THE CONNECTION

Finn cover: he's a
new hero!"We need a
pilot..."

THE FILM

Interstellar (2014)

THE CONNECTION

Poe cover: he's a
pilot. Simple."You be
careful..."

THE FILM

The Princess Bride
(1987)

THE CONNECTION

Kylo Ren cover: he
wears a mask."If anybody's
anybody..."

THE FILM

Armageddon
(1998)

THE CONNECTION

Han cover: Quote
mentions Han.

THE WINNER

Brett Cruice,
via email

THE REWARD

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release 30th anniversary CDs they add bonus material. This gives the release meaning. *American Beauty* 17 years and six months on, rediscovered and reinterpreted. Who cares? By the way I still look forward to your magazine even now. I am just griping. Can you award me a prize for this letter as I am celebrating my arrival into this world with a milestone date of 48 years, eight months, four days, 20 hours, 56 minutes and a few seconds. A copy of *Legend Of The Holy Drinker* Blu-ray would be awesome. It's actually celebrating its 28th anniversary this year...

NICK, VIA EMAIL

We reckon a special, in-depth look back at a classic film in an issue guest-edited by said film's director is a pretty great idea (odd anniversary date aside). But you know what they say about opinions: you have 'em... and we print 'em!

SUPER-FATIGUE

Empire! Thank you! So nice to finally have issues of your magazine that aren't filled with superhero content. Your last few issues have been mint! I cannot stand another superhero flick, they're doing my head in. I get it, they look amazing, the special effects are revolutionary but since when is that what makes a movie great? What's the point in a cool looking movie if there's not a good story? Thank you for something different other than the constant stream of spandex and explosions, I can't handle anymore.

TOM JOHNSTON, VIA EMAIL

Got a feeling you won't be checking out this issue's cover feature, Tom...

A LIFETIME OF MOVIE LOVE

Hey *Empire*, you probably get these all the time, but I feel the need to send you my story! I've loved movies ever since I was a kid. I saw more than just a movie and for 12 years I've dedicated my life to watching movies! I worked in a video shop from the age of 14 until 16, then in a different one at 18. I ended up running it for three years until we closed down six months ago. Heartbroken is an understatement. I started buying *Empire* in 2008. I stopped for a while in 2011, but then started up

again in 2013. I have issues 79-116 and 153-177. I lost issues 163-169 while moving house and I've never been more upset in my whole life. The open magazine in the photo is issue 100. The photo shoot where selected actors re-enacted their most famous movies is one of my favourite specials. Thanks for reading!

JON R, VIA EMAIL

And thanks for writing, Jon! We like to think *Empire* is a place where all lifelong movie lovers get together and geek out, so glad to have you along for the ride!

IN THE OFFICE THIS MONTH



December 16, 2015: Team *Empire* (L-R: Craig Carroll, Daniel Murphy, David Brown and James Jennings) arrive at the Sydney *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* premiere, where we received a BB-8 medallion each. Nerd. Tastic.

Premiere

EDITED by CHRIS HEWITT



>> BULLETIN >> LAURENCE FISHBURNE JOINS MATRIX CO-STAR KEANU REEVES IN JOHN WICK 2

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE

BANG BANG BANG BANG

**GOSLING AND CROWE ARE
SHANE BLACK'S *THE NICE GUYS***

IT'S A PERFECT SHANE BLACK situation," says producer Joel Silver of *The Nice Guys*. And Silver should know — he's presided over a few.

The first was 1987's *Lethal Weapon*, and the last was Black's brilliant directorial debut, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, back in 2005. Now the duo have reteamed for *The Nice Guys*, a buddy-buddy action comedy which taps into Black's obsession with the seedy detective novels he'd spend his lunch money on at school.

"When I'm directing this action scene, I'm thinking 'I've seen this as a kid on the cover of *The Executioner #19: Detroit Deathwatch!*'" laughs Black. The scene in question, with an Atlanta hotel standing in for Downtown LA and the Pacific Auto Show 1978 (this is Black's first period piece), is third-act real estate, so we'll be vague, but it involves Russell Crowe's Jackson Healy and Ryan Gosling's Holland March chasing a suitably MacGuffin while bullets fly, smoke fills the air and women in glitzy gowns abandon their half-drunk Martinis. There's also a fair amount of none-more-Black banter between the leads.

"It's a character-based action movie," explains Silver. "Russell's the serious, tough guy and Ryan is the morally ambiguous detective. When you see them, it's magic. People think it's Butch and Sundance. I say they're like Laurel and Hardy, or Abbott and Costello!" Or, perhaps, Riggs and Murtaugh. Joe Hallenbeck and Jimmy Dix. Harry Lockhart and Gay Perry. You get the gist.

"This is what Joel and Shane do best," says Gosling, sporting a porn-star tache and a plaster cast on one arm. "If *Lethal Weapon* and *48 Hours* had a kid and he lost his virginity while *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* was on the TV, this movie would be that." In other words, it's a perfect Shane Black situation. **EB**

Holland March (Ryan Gosling)
and Jackson Healy
(Russell Crowe) get heavy.

THE NICE GUYS IS OUT ON MAY 26.

FIRST LOOK

THE COHEN BROTHERS

MARK STRONG AND SACHA BARON COHEN
GET THEIR GUNS OUT IN *GRIMSBY*

AS STATEMENTS OF INTENT GO, LOUIS Leterrier, director of *Grimsby*, roughly the 837th spy movie to be released over the past 12 months, has a doozy. “I loved *Spy*, I loved *Kingsman*, *Mission: Impossible* was really fun,” he says. “But there are certain things in our movie that cannot be in any of these movies. It’s beyond anything that’s been committed to film.”

Given that *Kingsman* ended with heads exploding to the tune of Elgar’s *Pomp & Circumstance*, that’s saying something. But when you consider that Sacha Baron Cohen is the star, co-writer and producer of *Grimsby*, then maybe Leterrier might not be bluffing. Cohen, after all, is no stranger to committing outrageous acts to celluloid. “Sacha just pushes the envelope,” says co-star Mark Strong. “I’m sure everyone will manage to be offended by something or other.”

The story sees Cohen play Nobby Butcher, a warm-hearted, England football team-loving father of eight who lives in Grimsby with his girlfriend (Rebel Wilson). The only blight on his life: he was separated from his brother, Sebastian, when he was a kid, and he’s been looking for him ever since. When a tip finally leads him to his brother, he learns the astonishing truth: Sebastian Butcher is now super-spy Sebastian Graves (Strong). “When James Bond fails they call this guy,” laughs Leterrier. “But Nobby shows up, messes up Sebastian’s mission and now they’re on the run, dragging each other through mud. And other substances.”

Leterrier says *Grimsby* is three movies in one. There’s the hardcore action movie (“Sometimes you have to cover your eyes, it’s so real”) with POV sequences showing off Strong’s spy skills. There’s the comedy, of course, and then there’s the story of two chalk-and-cheese brothers. “You don’t want to shock just to shock,” adds Leterrier. “You want to tell an emotional story, too. It’s the Sacha I love — there’s a bite to it, but deep inside the character is very sweet.”

The movie has copped flak from Grimsby — in the north of England — residents, fearful that the film will bring dishonour upon the Humberside town. “There’s nothing to fear. It’s not condescending,” says Leterrier, using a word that means “having an attitude of patronising superiority”. “What we’re saying is Grimsby is a community, and London is not. They should be proud of the movie!” **CHRIS HEWITT**

GRIMSBY IS OUT ON MARCH 10.



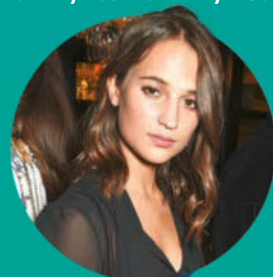
> INHERENT VICE'S KATHERINE WATERSTON TO STAR IN RIDLEY SCOTT'S *ALIEN: COVENANT*

Premiere

ON THE RADAR



Noomi Rapace might play the great Amy Winehouse. Rapace can do accents and her name half-rhymes with "Amy". Sold.



Sony is hoping to adapt the new Lisbeth Salander book, *The Girl In The Spider's Web*, with actual Swede Alicia Vikander in the role.



Duncan Jones's passion project, the sci-fi *Mute*, has bagged its stars: Alexander Skarsgård, Sam Rockwell and Paul Rudd.



Liam Neeson is Deep Throat? Not Linda Lovelace. Instead, he'll be Mark Felt, aka the guy who took down Tricky Dick, in *Felt*.

Mark Strong and Sacha Baron Cohen are Sebastian and Nobby, the Butcher Brothers, in *Grimsby*.

> WILL ROBIN WRIGHT TAKE NICOLE KIDMAN'S VACATED ROLE IN *Wonder Woman*?

ON SET EXCLUSIVE!

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH THEM

TINA FEY AND AMY POEHLER ARE TAKING ON THE EMPIRE

WHAT DO YOU DO when you're brave enough to come out close to the new *Star Wars*? What can you offer to compete with a Millennium Falcon, \$300 million-worth of CGI and a little roly robot that goes 'bloop'? "Well", says Tina Fey, star of *Sisters*, which is coming three weeks after *The Force Awakens*, "we've got the 'New Kids On The Block', 'The Cabbage Patch', the 'typewriter'. I think there's also a 'Roger Rabbit' in there." Suck on that, Kylo Ren.

Fey is referring to the moves that she and close friend and collaborator Amy Poehler have displayed, for the past four hours, on the set of *Sisters*. Moves that might just take Han Solo down.

For their first film together since 2008's *Baby Mama*, Poehler and Fey are playing siblings Maura and Jane, one over-achieving and uptight, the other perhaps a little too loose. When their parents (Dianne Wiest and James Brolin) announce they're selling their childhood home, the sisters decide that they will throw one last house party to bid farewell to their old lives. *Empire* has

come to New York to witness a part of this shindig, as Poehler and Fey bust moves, in a completely trashed bungalow surrounded by roaring fortysomethings, to *Informer*, the 'classic' song by Snow. It is a thing to behold. A licky boom-boom down, indeed.

Given how popular their pairing has been, from *SNL* to the Golden Globes, it's surprising it's taken Fey and Poehler so long to team up again on screen. "We like to make a film together every seven years, without fail," says Poehler. "It's like a Michael Apter project," adds Fey. "Actually," continues Poehler, "working on projects has kind of become the only way we can see each other."

So now we just have to wait until 2022 for their next film. "Oh, it's the film four out from now that you wanna see," says Fey. "That one's going to be rough." Poehler laughs. "By that time it will just be us sitting in a coffee shop and staring at each other." And probably duking it out with *Episode XIII*. **OLLY RICHARDS**

SISTERS IS OUT NOW AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 38.

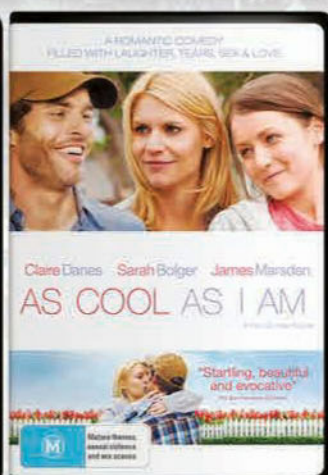
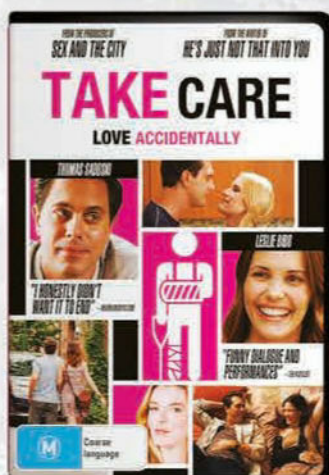
Above: Comedy siblings Tina Fey and Amy Poehler in *Sisters*.
Below: Throwing that one last house party. What could go wrong?



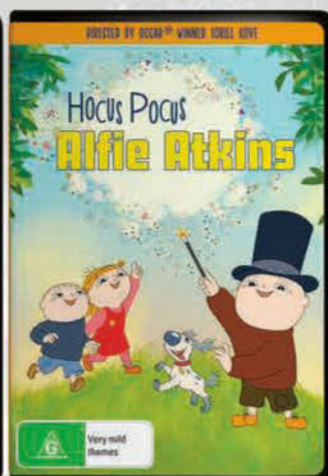
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9 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT... INFERNO

EMPIRE TAKES A DANTE'S PEEK INSIDE THE NEW ROBERT LANGDON MOVIE

IT'S BEEN SEVEN YEARS since Tom Hanks last filled the Hush Puppies of Dan Brown's symbologist Robert Langdon, but he'll return to the role next October in *Inferno*, using his archaic knowledge to solve teasers that would stump Sherlock Holmes at his most wildest. We travelled to Florence to get director Ron Howard and his cast to decipher *Inferno*'s secrets in nine rings of info.

1 *Inferno* is the third Langdon movie, following *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *Angels & Demons* (2009). There are four novels in Dan Brown's series, but the filmmakers have skipped the third in the series, 2009's *The Lost Symbol*, which was set in the US. "I love the international nature of this," says Howard of the decision. "As an American, part of the excitement for me creatively is directing people whose roots and sensibilities might be slightly different from mine. I take inspiration from that."

2 The Langdon movies have made \$1.2 billion worldwide, perhaps the most successful franchise never to boast a toy line. Yet Howard barely acknowledges them as sequels. "I haven't thought of them as movies that are trying to benefit from a predecessor," he says. "It's following the Robert Langdon character on another experience." Hanks, though, feels it isn't entirely a clean slate. "Everything we have done to

this point has contributed to the motivation and the mindset of Robert Langdon. We don't have to talk about the past. We carry it with us more or less in every scene. That is a luxury for any actor without having to go through the storybook in order to make an introduction."

3 This time around, Langdon is on the trail of Bertrand Zobrist (Ben Foster), a mad genius scientist obsessed with *Inferno* (Dante's, not Dario Argento's) who is hell-bent on solving the world's population problem by releasing a killer virus. It's a familiar mixture of puzzle-cracking, literary and religious symbolism, foot chases around picturesque landmarks and shady organisations. "I feel the elements that make the movies work are in the DNA of Dan's stories and the settings," says Howard.

4 *Inferno* shot under the working title 'Headache'. And Langdon starts the movie with a doozy, waking up in a hotel room in Florence, with no memory of how he got there. "Langdon is not sitting around Harvard waiting for a call," says Hanks. "He is in the middle of it and has no idea what is happening to him. He doesn't have the facility he had in the other films, because literally his head is not quite working right, which really does alter the first two thirds of the film."

5 The film shot in Venice, Florence and Budapest during the northern spring/summer of 2015. It was originally slated to come out on December 18, one week after *In The Heart Of The Sea*, directed by one... Ron Howard. It's not hard to see why *Inferno* was pushed back.

6 Like Doctor Who, Langdon has had a different companion in each adventure: here, Felicity Jones's Dr. Sienna Brooks follows in the



> STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS CAST ALL SET TO RETURN FOR STAR WARS EPISODE VIII



footsteps of Audrey Tatou and Ayelet Zurer. To prep, Jones spent time with an ER doctor in New York “watching her work under incredible pressure and make life and death decisions very quickly. Sienna enjoys the pressure of that.”

7 Rounding out the cast are Irrfan Khan as the mastermind of a sinister consortium working with Zobrist, Omar Sy as the leader of a secret paramilitary group and Sidse Babbett Knudsen, best known for *Borgen*

and *The Duke Of Burgundy*, as the head of the World Health Organization, who hire Langdon to track down the virus. Hanks aside, no actor has appeared in more than one Langdon movie.

8 A key MacGuffin in the story is Dante’s Death Mask, a precious artefact preserved in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. It was once thought that the visage was Dante Alighieri’s actual death mask, carved from his lifeless face. Yet scholars now believe it is the cast of a

Above: Tom Hanks’s Robert Langdon goes on the run with Felicity Jones’s Dr. Sienna Brooks in *Inferno*.
Left: Ben Foster.

lost sepulchral effigy of the poet. Boo.

9 For his third go-round on the Dan Brown carousel, Howard is taking a different approach. “I’ve tried to use the psychology of what the characters are going through to alter the approach, to pick up the pace. It is a more of a psychological thriller and that suggests different styles for me as a director. It’s fun, not holding back.” **IAN FREER**

INFERNO IS OUT ON OCTOBER 13, 2016

> SCARLETT JOHANSSON IN FINAL TALKS TO STAR IN RAUNCHY COMEDY *MOVE THAT BODY*



The Yes Camp

HELEN O'HARA

Few things infuriate me more than the conventional Hollywood wisdom that female superheroes don't work. How can anyone believe that when the single most iconic female superhero has never appeared on the big screen? No, I'm not counting *The Lego Movie*. Wonder Woman has endured false starts ever since the 1980s, with Ivan Reitman and a pre-*Avengers* Joss Whedon trying and failing to get her onto the big screen. Now she's on her way, and it's about damn time.

About as powerful as Superman and gifted with a mythologically-tinged back story that has the potential for Thor-style family drama, Diana Prince/Wonder Woman comes to our world with a stranger's eye for absurdity and an innate sense of justice. The best Wonder Woman comics have explored both those epic roots and that outsider view, and with a film story that we're told will take in Diana's entirely female homeland of Themyscira, World War I Europe and the present(ish) day where we meet her in *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, this film should offer the opportunity for all three.

Beyond that, there is compelling evidence that Wonder Woman can work on screen, from DC's great animated output to the still fondly-remembered Lynda Carter-starring TV series of the 1970s. As a tiny child, I used to come home from playgroup complaining that the boys had built Lego guns to use in the playground — but it was OK because I crossed my wrists and spun around, Carter-style, and the bullets all bounced off my (invisible) shield bracelets. Those boys have since had seven solo Batman films, six Superman films and one face-off / team-up of both. Where's my *Wonder Woman* movie, dammit?

This first image doesn't guarantee that director Patty Jenkins has nailed the character, although Gal Gadot's Diana looks the part. But combined with a cast that also includes Chris Pine as Steve Trevor, Robin Wright (as, I'm guessing, Diana's mother Queen Hippolyta), Danny Huston, David Thewlis, Saïd Taghmaoui, Elena Anaya and Lucy Davis, it's a promising start. With filming now underway in London, France and Italy, the most powerful woman in comics might finally get her due.



THE BIG DEBATE

INTO THE WONDER

TWO EMPIRE WRITERS WONDER IF WONDER WOMAN WILL BE WONDERFUL...



The No Camp

CHRIS HEWITT

There's a saying we have at *Empire* Towers: every day is Christmas Eve. Which means that we treat each film, even if it looks awful or has Kevin James in it, with equal optimism. They're all presents sitting under our tree, and until the wrapping paper is ripped off, they could all be a bike! A TV! A *Lovejoy* box set!

In reality, though, there's usually that one present that you're not sure about. Perhaps it rattles when you pick it up, perhaps it's shaped suspiciously like a pair of socks, perhaps it gives off a questionable stench.

Wonder Woman could be just that present.

As a kid, I really liked the Lynda Carter TV show, the one with the twirling transformation and the earworm theme tune. And I understand WW's place in the firmament as one of DC's big three, but I never thought her powers were as cool as, say, The Flash. He can run so fast he can travel through time. Wonder Woman has a lasso. Not just any lasso, mind — a Lasso Of Truth. No wonder it's been hard for Warner Bros. to get this character to the big screen, even in a world where Marvel managed to make a film about a guy who can shrink down to the size of an ant.

My scepticism has stemmed mostly from the slightly confused genesis of this movie. First, there were rumours that five writers were penning different drafts of the screenplay, which would then be compressed into one giant Frankenscript. Then there was the faffing with directors, with *Breaking Bad*'s Michelle MacLaren hired — briefly — before moving on, to be replaced by Patty Jenkins. I worry that, as it can be with Marvel, it will be hard for any director to impose their vision on something when the nuts and bolts of this universe have been decided in advance.

Don't get me wrong. I think Gal Gadot rocks, and will make the role her own. And I want this movie — and the whole DC Cinematic Universe — to be the best it can be. But I worry. I worry about tone. I worry about cohesion. I worry about the frickin' Lasso Of Truth. I worry that the rattling present under the tree could be a Kevin James boxset.

WONDER WOMAN IS OUT IN 2017.



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BEST OF TIMES/WORST OF TIMES

NICK FROST

ON GOING TOPLESS FOR QT, TATTOOS AND BEING BOOED BY BUILDERS

BEST



COSTUME

Ed's costume from *Shaun Of The Dead*. That's essentially what I wear. House shorts and a T-shirt. There was one that said 'Bumpin' Donuts' in a Dunkin' Donuts font, but I think they said we couldn't use it, which was a shame.

WORST



The costume on *Snow White & The Huntsman*. It's a beautiful costume, designed by Colleen Atwood, but it's so friggin' hot. There's layer upon layer of thick wool and armour, and it takes ages to get it on. Someone has to do my boots up!

MOMENT

When I did the whole showdance during *Cuban Fury*, at Koko in Camden. Doing that was amazing. I had to go off in the corner and have a little cry, I was so proud of myself.



On *Spaced*, there was a scene between Simon [Pegg] and I that I hadn't marked up in my script. It took about four hours. I couldn't get one line out without stopping. I ate lunch alone that day. Now I'm always prepared.



FAN ENCOUNTER

On *Paul*, me and Simon had a guy doing day security. He came up one day and said, "Would you sign my arm?" I did mine really big, and he came back four hours later and had had it tattooed on. I felt really guilty that I did it extremely big.

There's a type of person who's a pain in the bum. "My mate reckons you're on telly." Or "My mate says you're famous, but I've never seen you." If you start with that, you usually get short shrift. I don't hold back.

LOCATION

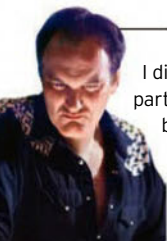
On *The Huntsman*, we were at a place in Gloucestershire called Puzzlewood. It inspired Tolkien to write *The Lord Of The Rings*. I was walking around dressed as a dwarf thinking, "This is fucking great."



On *The World's End*, we shot the catacombs scenes in a concrete tube 30 metres under the ground, and there were no lifts. At the end of the week you felt like Gollum. You hadn't seen any sun.

AUDITION

I did an audition for *Death Proof*, to play the part Quentin Tarantino ended up playing, the barman. We were shooting *Hot Fuzz* and I had to put myself on tape and weirdly I did it topless. I thought he'd find it funny, but I never heard anything back...



I was once made to do a 90-minute improv for a film I didn't get. The director was a real piece of work and said some weird things. **CH**

NICK FROST'S TRUTHS, HALF TRUTHS AND LITTLE WHITE LIES: A MEMOIR IS OUT NOW.



Despite being a big Beatles fan, Robert Zemeckis has never visited the zebra crossing outside Abbey Road. Sort it out, Bob.



If you're pregnant, Jeff Goldblum will bless your child while doing an impression of Vito Corleone.



Rob Lowe has just discovered the British phrase, "It's all gone a bit Pete Tong," and loves saying it. As you do.



Matthew McConaughey's brother Rooster has named his kids Miller Lyte and Margarita. Alright alright alright.

Five Things WILL POULTER

• PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT HOLYOAK. GROOMING: MIRA H. AT FACEPRO.CO.UK USING SKINCARE BY L'OCITANE. STYLING: KRISTINE KILTY. SHIRT: RICHARD JAMES. COAT: BLK DNM. TROUSERS: BROOKS BROTHERS. SHOES: PRADA. SHOT AT OVER THE ROAD, LONDON.



→ HE HAD THE TIME OF HIS LIFE ON *THE REVENANT*

"I'd get on a plane to Canada and do it all again tomorrow," says Will Poulter of shooting Alejandro G. Iñárritu's survival Western. "You'd wake up, travel several hours up a mountain, rehearse all day on an absolutely amazing camera shot, and capture it with only 15 minutes left. It was exciting."



→ HE'S AN OLD-TIME PA

Poulter plays Jim Bridger, who helps Leonardo DiCaprio's fur trapper, Hugh Glass, in his quest for revenge after Glass is left for dead. Poulter describes Bridger as "a PA of the 1800s: 'You have to shoot a beaver at midday, Hugh.'" He pauses. "That's terrible. You'd be trapping a beaver, not shooting it. My knowledge has gone already!"



→ HE'S NOT A CLOWN

The 22-year-old's big break came as Kenny in *We're The Millers*, in which his bollocks were bitten by a spider. Predictably he was offered countless similar roles afterwards but, "In my eyes, I'm not an actor if I can't do anything different to Kenny. I love comedy, but not as much as I love drama."



→ REALLY, HE'S NOT A CLOWN

Poulter was cast as Pennywise, the ancient alien spider-clown villain in Cary Fukunaga's mooted adaptation of Stephen King's *It*. But when Fukunaga exited the project, so too did Poulter. "My loyalties had to be with Cary. His vision for *It* was brilliant, dark, really layered and original. I'm gutted it's not happening."



→ HE'S A NATURAL MIMIC

Poulter's CV boasts several superb American accents. "I just wanted to be like my dad," he says. "He can do most accents. I don't know if I'm good at accents, but I know I annoyed a lot of people doing them at school." CH

THE REVENANT IS OUT NOW AND WAS REVIEWED IN THE LAST ISSUE.

> A FAITHFUL TO THE SOURCE NOVEL *WAR OF THE WORLDS* ADAPTATION COMING TO UK TV



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

GET SHORT

HOW THE GUY WHO MADE ANCHORMAN DIRECTED THE YEAR'S ANGRIEST MOVIE

THE *BIG SHORT* IS MANY things. It's the first movie to tell the inside story of the collapse of the housing market in the US in 2007/08, which very nearly drove the world economy to the brink of collapse. It's very funny, as you might expect from Adam McKay, the director of both *Anchorman* movies. It's very

clever, using every cinematic trick in the book, from voiceover and diagrams to celebrity cameos, to make its info dump of tricky terms more palatable. (If you don't know what a CDO is beforehand, you will afterwards.) But what you might not expect is how sobering and nightmarish it is — anger about the incompetence, deceit and fraud that led to the collapse emanates from every frame.

"It's a hard story to tell without outrage," says McKay. "I don't know that chemically it can be done. Even if I said it in a silly voice. Which we kinda do."

Steve Carell and Ryan Gosling in *The Big Short*. Hair not models' own.

Based on the non-fiction book by Michael Lewis, who also wrote *Moneyball*, *The Big Short* focuses on some unusual protagonists — financial wizards who realised that the housing-market bubble, formed of bad loans, was about to burst in a big way. So they decided to 'short' the market by placing huge bets against it. Very simply, if the housing market collapsed, they stood to (and did) become very rich, while ordinary people lost their jobs and homes. These men, played by an A-list cast including Steve Carell, Christian Bale,

> MARK WAHLBERG CONFIRMED FOR FIFTH *TRANSFORMERS* MOVIE > CATE BLANCHETT IN TALKS



Ryan Gosling and Brad Pitt, are the heroes of the story. “I like the fact it’s a messy hero’s journey,” says McKay. “I love that these guys are a little dirty. The big challenge to me is that you can end the movie with these guys making hundreds of millions of dollars and yet you don’t feel good about it. There’s no victory lap. Talk to these guys today and they all feel a little tainted by it.”

If it seems strange that the bloke who made a film where Will Ferrell sings to a great white shark should then make a heavy-duty political animal that will be in

the Oscars shake-up (it’s been nominated for four Golden Globes), then you haven’t been paying attention. All of McKay’s films — yes, even *Step Brothers* — have a satirical edge, while he actually ended his 2010 cop comedy, *The Other Guys*, with an animated lecture about... the financial crisis. “Maybe the first two minutes of my first conversation with Christian Bale was me making a joke, ‘You’ve seen *Talladega Nights*. This is not that,’” says McKay. “But anyone who knows me, like Will, didn’t even blink.” Speaking of Ferrell, this is the first film McKay’s made

From top: Christian Bale’s Michael Burry; Brad Pitt as banking guru Ben Rickert; Gosling and Adam McKay joke on set.

without his friend. “There is no schism,” says McKay. “There was just no obvious character for him. He liked the idea that it was a little different, a little outside.”

But since *Anchorman 2*, McKay has written *Ant-Man* with Paul Rudd and then recruited Steve Carell to star in *The Big Short*. Is he sure there isn’t a schism? “Maybe Ferrell should read something into it,” laughs McKay. “Maybe I’m in denial!” **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE BIG SHORT IS OUT ON JANUARY 14 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 39.

PROFILE

HALLOW THERE

MEET CORIN HARDY: HORROR'S NEXT BIG THING

Corin Hardy and some of *The Hallow's* title stars. Yes, he's the one in the middle.

CORIN HARDY DOESN'T have a tattoo, but if he did it would be of one word: "resilient". "The last time I saw Ray Harryhausen, I had lunch with him in Edinburgh," says Hardy. "He suddenly said to me, 'Are you resilient? In this industry, you gotta be resilient!'"

Resilience has never been a problem for Hardy. The UK-based filmmaker has been knocking on the door of the movie industry for over a decade now. First there was a selection of acclaimed music videos with the likes of The Prodigy and McFly, then came a close call with Yeti horror *The Refuge*, which Sam Raimi was once on board to produce. But, it seemed, Hardy just couldn't get a film off the ground.

The Hallow changes all that. A creepy supernatural siege movie about malevolent fairies running amok in an Irish wood, it's brought Hardy to the attention of Hollywood, securing him the directing gig on the reboot of *The Crow*. Not bad for an idea he first had a decade ago. Way to go, resilience. "I always had this idea of a fairytale home-invasion movie," he says. "I wanted to show fairies not how we see them in, say, Disney films, but Irish folklore tales of these much darker, human-sized creatures. I don't want to replicate what's come before in terms of creatures."

Despite lingering in development, (see right) *The Crow* reboot is next, and



Exclusive concept art, courtesy of Corin Hardy.

then *The Refuge*. Hardy promises "a grand adventure story. I want to do a monster movie about a Yeti and make it terrifying, intelligent and strange."

Many directors pop their cherry in horror as a means to an end, but Hardy is in for the long haul. "I always wanted to make a horror film," he says. "Great horror movies are *the* great movies, to me. The dark side of things is more appealing." **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE HALLOW IS OUT IN 2016.

"I DON'T THINK IT'S CURSED..."

CORIN HARDY UPDATES US ON *THE CROW*

HARDY SECURED A DREAM GIG when he agreed to direct *The Crow* reboot. After all, he even used to dress up as Brandon Lee's Eric Draven from the 1994 movie.

The film was to shoot in 2015 with Jack Huston on board to star. But when backers Relativity filed for bankruptcy, Huston left and *The Crow* went into limbo before recently getting back on track (it shoots this year). Given the chequered history of the project, including Lee's tragic on-set death, it's easy to draw a morbid conclusion...

Is *The Crow* cursed?

Having just made an indie movie that took eight years to make, it feels the opposite. I don't believe that the

production is cursed. That would be terrible.

How close were you previously to making the film?

I had a full cast coming together. We were set up in Pinewood Studios. I had my offices and art team ready.

What's the appeal of *The Crow* to you?

It's not a horror, but it has horrific elements and a very emotional current running through it. It's got romance and beauty and poetic qualities, but it's very violent and thrilling and has a lot of depth.

Have you found the new *Crow*?

I've got someone in mind who would be a fresh and inspired decision...



> JEREMY RENNER TO TAKE THE LEAD IN *UNDEFEATED: THE ROCKY MARCIANO STORY*

CRANK IT UP TO 11

SEAN BYRNE RETURNS WITH *THE DEVIL'S CANDY*: SUPERNATURAL HORROR DRIPPING WITH BLOOD AND DRENCHED IN HEAVY METAL

SIX YEARS ON FROM *THE LOVED ONES*, IN WHICH a would-be prom queen terrorised her chosen date with a pneumatic drill, Australian director Sean Byrne is back — only this time, it's the devil himself that's to blame for the carnage that unfolds.

The Devil's Candy, which had its world premiere at last year's Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), is a supernatural horror set inside a haunted house. A young family moves in before an evil presence slowly infects their lives, and that of a local oddball. Soon enough, all hell breaks loose.

Byrne wrote close to 50 drafts of the heavy metal-infused romp. He says he wanted to follow up his 2010 cult debut with something ballsy, but it took a while to convince those in Hollywood (where he's been based) to play ball.

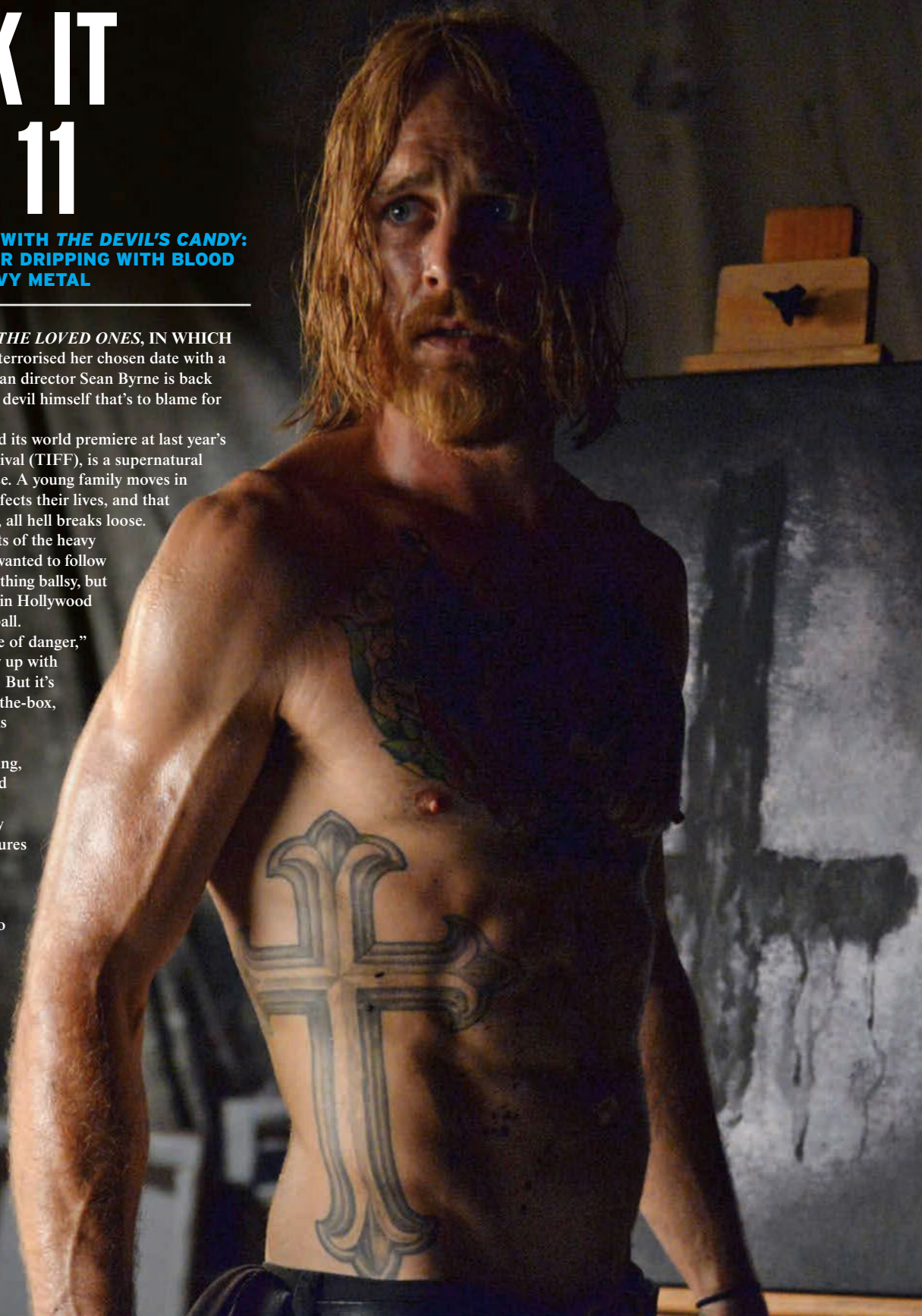
"*The Loved Ones* had a sense of danger," he says. "And I wanted to follow up with something equally as dangerous. But it's tough making something out-of-the-box, even in Hollywood. The film asks the question, 'If you could sell your soul to be better at something, would you? Even if it jeopardised those you love?'"

The film, which he originally pitched as a "doom opera", features the music of Metallica, among others. It's music Byrne grew up with, and still holds dear to his horror-loving heart. "I wanted to have the story be the shape of a metal concert, with the smashing of the V-neck guitar at the end," he says. He got his way.

Having found a way in to the lucrative US market, Byrne says it's now time to head home. "I have another idea I'm working on, more like *The Loved Ones*, with a through line that cuts like a knife," he says. "Now seems like the right time to do it."

ED GIBBS

THE DEVIL'S CANDY IS DUE FOR RELEASE IN 2016.



> KURT RUSSELL WANTED FOR STAR-LORD'S DAD IN *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2*

EMPIRE

May the Force be with you always...



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THE GRILL

RICHARD ARMITAGE

THE HOBBIT STAR HAS SOMETHING IN HIS POCKET

PORTRAIT TRACEY NEARMY

Whose poster did you have on your bedroom wall as a kid?

I seem to remember having a *Terminator* poster and a Samantha Fox poster. Put those together in a movie! That'd be crazy.

Do you have a nickname?

If I tell you that then people will start calling me it on social media and it's very personal, so I can't say that. My brother used to get called 'Armo'. It sounds Australian, doesn't it?

Have you ever punched a director?

[Laughs] No, never. Have I had a row with a director? I've had some butt-clenching moments where I've banged my head against the wall. But what's the point? You don't get anything achieved.

What was the last TV show you gave up on?

Oh God. You know what? I'm going to say *Game Of Thrones*. I started watching it when I'd just finished on *The Hobbit* and I think it was just too much fantasy for me. I'm sure I'll come back to it, but I'd had too much of wigs and dragons and all that kind of thing. I was dragoned out.

How far did you get?

I didn't get far at all. Everyone says it's worth watching but the more people say that, the more it makes you want to watch *House Of Cards* again.

On a scale of one to 10, how hairy is your arse?

I beg your pardon? There is *no* way I am answering that question. No way on this earth. Who wants to know the answer to that?



Well...

And are you talking about cheeks or crack? The answer to that question is in episode 11 of *Hannibal*.

Do you have any scars?

I have a scar between my eyebrows, which I got on *The Hobbit*. I have a feeling it might be with me forever. I caught myself between the eyes with the little hook on the Orcrist sword, and it sliced through the prosthetic and went through a flap of skin between my eyebrows. We stopped it bleeding and then when I took the prosthetic off, it reopened the wound and I put a sticky plaster on it. I probably should have got stitches.

What was the last movie you paid to see?
Ex Machina. Money well spent.

What's the stupidest question you've ever been asked?

I think it's probably, "On a scale of one to 10, how hairy is your arse?"

What's in your pocket right now?

[Laughs] Nothing. My genitals are in my pocket right now.

What's the worst thing you've ever eaten?

It was a tiny Amazonian ant. I ate it when I was in São Paulo at a really expensive restaurant, but it was really tasty. It tasted of lemons.

What would you call your autobiography?
My Genitals Are In My Pocket Right Now. JW

HANNIBAL SEASON 3 IS OUT ON DVD AND BLU-RAY FEBRUARY 24.

DID YOU KNOW?

• He plays the flute.

• He suffers from aquaphobia, the fear of drowning. Sounds fair.

• He was born on the anniversary of Richard III's death.



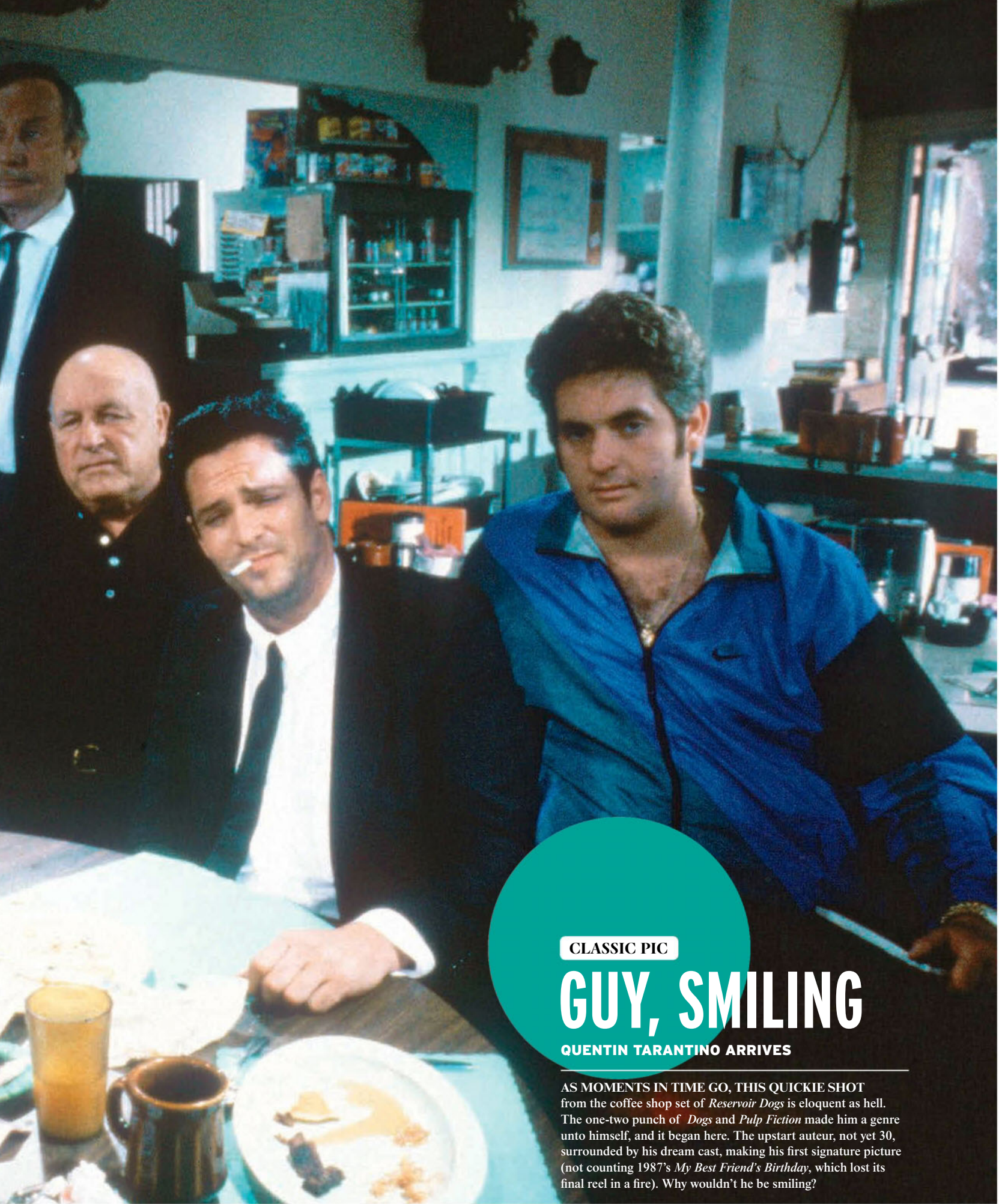
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CLASSIC PIC

GUY, SMILING

QUENTIN TARANTINO ARRIVES

AS MOMENTS IN TIME GO, THIS QUICKIE SHOT from the coffee shop set of *Reservoir Dogs* is eloquent as hell. The one-two punch of *Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* made him a genre unto himself, and it began here. The upstart auteur, not yet 30, surrounded by his dream cast, making his first signature picture (not counting 1987's *My Best Friend's Birthday*, which lost its final reel in a fire). Why wouldn't he be smiling?

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The Hateful Eight

★★★★★

OUT JANUARY 21 / RATED R18+ / 187 MINS.

DIRECTOR Quentin Tarantino

CAST Samuel L. Jackson, Kurt Russell, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Walton Goggins, Demian Bechir, Tim Roth, Michael Madsen, Bruce Dern

PLOT Wyoming, circa 1875. Bounty hunter John Ruth (Russell) is taking criminal Daisy Domergue (Jason Leigh) to Red Rock by stagecoach. Picking up Marquis Warren (Jackson) and newly-minted Sherriff Chris Mannix (Goggins) en route, they stop to ride out a blizzard at Minnie's Haberdashery. But they are not alone.

ACCORDING TO QUENTIN

Tarantino, you need to make three Westerns to be considered a Westerns director. His second, *The Hateful Eight*, might follow chronologically from *Django Unchained*, being set after the US Civil War, but it's a very different beast. It starts huge. A brooding Ennio Morricone overture. A Cinerama logo. Stunning snowy landscapes (though if *The Hateful Eight* had a cold-off with *The Revenant*, Inárritu's film would edge it). But, like Howard Hawks's *Rio Bravo* or the TV Westerns he grew up on, Tarantino ultimately narrows his focus to the intimate: eight glorious bastards in one cabin for nearly three hours. And that clash of characters is tons of fun.

As ever with Tarantino, the storytelling works by stealth. The first half is unhurried, even patience-testing. Bounty hunter John Ruth (Kurt Russell) journeys to deliver badass Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh) to Red Rock for hanging, picking up Marquis Warren (Samuel L. Jackson) and Sherriff Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins) like a horse-drawn Uber. Their trip is full of chat about Chatanooga steaks, a letter from Abraham Lincoln and Civil War reminiscences, but there's little in the way of compelling incident. And even when we reach Stagecoach stopover Minnie's Haberdashery and meet the second half of the 'orrible octet — Bob the Mexican (Demian Bechir), hangman Oswald Mobray (Tim Roth), cowpoke Joe Gage (Michael Madsen) and confederate General Smithers (Bruce Dern) — the slow burning chat continues.



But, like Carpenter's *The Thing*, an atmosphere of unease, dread and distrust builds almost imperceptibly, ending in a barnstorming Samuel L. Jackson speech that finishes Act One with a bullet. By the time you come back after the interval to a cheeky Tarantino-narrated recap, it has its claws in you. As the pieces slot quickly into place, the investment you made in these people and their predicaments begins to pay off, big time.

If the first half is driven by Russell on stoic, bearlike form, the second



belongs to Jackson. Marquis Warren is the best role he has had in ages, owning the floor as a Civil War Columbo trying to prove that some rat in the wooden house is in “cahoots” with Domergue. Goggins is great comic relief (but also more), Leigh is put through the mill (she is punched, rifle whacked and scalded with hot stew in just the first half) and Roth has fun as the kind of eloquent European dandy recently monopolised by Christoph Waltz.

Altogether now: John Ruth (Kurt Russell) and Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh) give General Smithers (Bruce Dern) a right earful.

Nerds will have a field day checking off Tarantino tropes: chapter headings, Red apple tobacco, timeline jiggery-pokery and a last act full of glorious grand guignol. But there is freshness too. Morricone’s score, Tarantino’s first with a composer, is used sparingly but effectively. Even more than *Django, Eight* is a politically charged film — especially its first half — as much about race and divisiveness in America today as an homage to *The High Chaparral*. And, along with DP Robert Richardson,

Tarantino has a blast orchestrating interior mayhem utilising the widths of Ultra Panavision 70, perhaps the only widescreen format capable of encompassing Kurt Russell’s magnificent ‘tache. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT On a par with *Inglourious Basterds* and *Django Unchained*, *The Hateful Eight* starts low-key but ultimately delivers big bold, blood-soaked rewards. Roll on QT Western number three.



Joy



OUT NOW / RATED M / 124 MINS.

DIRECTOR David O. Russell

CAST Jennifer Lawrence, Robert De Niro, Bradley Cooper, Virginia Madsen

PLOT As a child, Joy Mangano (Isabella Crovetti-Cramp) wants to be an inventor. Fast-forward a decade and the adult Joy (Lawrence) pins all those hopes on her latest gizmo, a self-wringing mop.

GEORGE BUSH SR. ONCE

observed that American families should be less like *The Simpsons* and more like *The Waltons*. God knows what he would make of the Manganos, a small-town clan in a more-or-less permanent state of chaos, with a divorced mum (Virginia Madsen) glued to soap operas, her daughter's ex-husband (Édgar Ramírez) living in the basement and a volatile dad (Robert De Niro) at the front door looking for a sofa to crash on. And even the Simpsons didn't have an outdoor shooting range just round the corner.

The lodestar in this head-spinning universe — Lisa in a world of Homers

— is Jennifer Lawrence's Joy Mangano, the heart of a story that was forged from real-life by *Bridesmaids* writer Annie Mumolo and reshaped by David O. Russell into an offbeat and half-successful skew on the American dream. We meet Joy as a ceaselessly imaginative child, then pick up with her, two kids later and still determined to invent and create, with Lawrence stepping into her harried shoes.

As the opening credits establish, this kinda-biopic is "inspired by the stories of daring women", and Lawrence's name increasingly belongs on any such list. Even in an ensemble of this calibre, she holds the screen as the gutsy entrepreneur-in-the-making, irrepressible in the face of constant discouragement and, at one point, utterly bereft as the threat of financial doom begins to suffocate. It's a performance simmering with controlled passion, and a likely awards favourite.

Nowadays, of course, Joy would just pitch up on *Shark Tank* and Janine Allis would be in for 30 per cent, but here her revolutionary cleaner-upper leads her to QVC, a burgeoning home-shopping channel run by Bradley Cooper's hard-but-fair businessman. Easily the most enjoyable chapter in a jerkily episodic tale, Joy's baptism into the art of TV-shilling is both horribly awkward

and hugely watchable. How can she sell herself in a live television environment where power-dressing prevails? And will her mop shift 50,000 units before all is lost? It's a race against time, only with Joan Rivers (played by her daughter, Melissa) on the stopwatch.

Cooper drifts handsomely in and out, while kudos to Russell for again locating the keys to Robert De Niro and drawing an entertainingly gruff turn from him as Joy's doubting father. Virginia Madsen, sporting the year's uncoolest specs, pulls off a rare blend of ferociousness and passivity as her housebound mum.

Somehow, though, it feels less than the sum of its stellar parts. Occasional dips into surrealism — there are echoes of Buñuel and Lynch as Joy imagines her family stepping into her mum's favourite soap — make for an uncomfortable fit with such conventional material, while the film only half commits to its voiceover narration. There's plenty of story here, but Russell never quite nails down a consistent way of telling it.

PHIL DE SEMLYEN

VERDICT Another dazzling Jennifer Lawrence performance anchors a blue-collar parable that boasts some inspired moments but never quite gels.

Joy (Jennifer Lawrence) and Rudy Mangano (Robert DeNiro), unhappy with the room's dimensions.



Spotlight



OUT **JANUARY 28** / RATED **M** / 128 MINS.

DIRECTOR Tom McCarthy

CAST Michael Keaton, Mark Ruffalo, Rachel McAdams, Liev Schreiber, John Slattery

PLOT In 2001, new editor Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber) charges *The Boston Globe's* investigative team *Spotlight* to probe child abuse by Catholic priests. They uncover a huge conspiracy of abuse and systemic cover-up by the church, abetted by the city's jurisprudence.

SOME STORIES ARE SO GOOD

you should just get out of their way, which is exactly what Tom McCarthy (*The Station Agent*, *The Visitor*) does with this old school, true life procedural. With narrative economy and a steady, unfussy hand he allows his script (co-written with Josh Singer) to unfold elegantly over the film's length, keeping a laser-like focus on the story and those pursuing it.

The Globe's revelations were ground zero in exposing the Catholic Church's complicit involvement in allowing pedophile priests to re-offend, which continues to uncover abuse around the world. Thus, even though we have an idea about where the film goes, each piece of discovery is felt like a gut punch, be it the

heartbreaking testimony of survivors, the sheer number of offenders in Boston (where over 50 per cent of the population identifies as Catholic), the awful depravity of the crimes and the wilful denial/collusion of the city pillars.

The ensemble cast are similarly sober, playing devoted news people, flawed and real, with secrets of their own, striking an impeccable tone without showboating. Odds are there won't be any Oscar noms among them, which is apt, but *Spotlight* is close to 2015's (US release) Best Picture. **DANIEL MURPHY**

VERDICT Magnificent cinema on every level: forthright, brave and compelling. The best account of newspapermen and women since *All The President's Men*.

Serious as hell: The *Spotlight* team are Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), Mike Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo), Matt Carroll (Brian d'Arcy James), Walter "Robby" Robinson (Michael Keaton) and Ben Bradlee Jr. (John Slattery).



Looking For Grace



OUT **JANUARY 26** / RATED **M** / 100 MINS.

DIRECTOR SUE BROOKS

CAST RICHARD ROXBURGH, RADHA MITCHELL, ODESSA YOUNG

An Australian movie released on Australia Day. Clever. If only this homegrown tale had more going for it than cultivating that awkward feeling of trying to like something more than you can.

Writer-director Sue Brooks (*Japanese Story*) has intended to depict how life is messy, ordinary and uncontrollable. While

such elements are apparent, the effect of watching parents (Roxburgh and Mitchell) search for their missing teen daughter (Young) heads in the opposite direction to engrossing verisimilitude.

Employing the *Rashomon* framework without demonstrating why, Brooks's tapestry of a family adrift suffers from its own lack of purpose. Gradually disclosing itself as an experiential movie committed to not needing a point, the characters and their limited insights don't provide compensation. What we're left with is a road to nowhere, populated by a fine cast and the spectre of potential. **BEN MCEACHEN**

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED M / 135 MINS.

DIRECTOR J.J. Abrams

CAST Harrison Ford, Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Adam Driver, Oscar Isaac, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Domhnall Gleeson

PLOT Luke Skywalker (Hamill) has vanished, and both the Resistance and the sinister First Order are searching for him. Crack pilot Poe Dameron (Isaac) obtains a clue to his whereabouts, but when everything goes wrong, a droid called BB-8 becomes the centre of the search, along with scavenger Rey (Ridley) and stormtrooper deserter FN-2187 (Boyega), who have found the droid.

IF YOU WERE TO MAKE A LIST OF

the essential ingredients of a *Star Wars* film, you would find almost all in J.J. Abrams's wake-up call to this sleeping giant of a franchise. From the biggest — dark versus light side, dogfights, mystical powers — to the smallest — mouse robots, turbo lasers, absurd alien Cantina music — this glories in reminding us what we all loved about this universe. By the end, it's given us a reason to be excited about *Star Wars'* future as well.

The story begins with Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac), “General Organa’s most daring pilot”, sent to recover a clue to the whereabouts of Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) on the desert planet of Jakku. Luke is, at first, the MacGuffin of this movie, the lure that gets everyone else moving. But Poe’s mission is interrupted by First Order forces led by Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) and Poe is taken prisoner — though not before he hides the necessary information inside his BB-8 droid, which duly escapes into the desert. BB-8 soon meets scavenger Rey (Daisy Ridley), stranded on the planet as an infant and still waiting for her parents to return for her.

Meanwhile, a stormtrooper involved in the attack where Poe was captured is having a crisis of conscience. FN-2187, soon rechristened Finn (John Boyega), sees an opportunity in this battered pilot and with his help hopes to escape the First Order Star Destroyer on which he serves. But when their ship crashes back on Jakku he’s forced to work with Rey

instead, while enemy forces close in on BB-8. Luckily there’s a “garbage” old Corellian YT model freighter nearby that they can use to escape — and soon its old owner comes to check out its familiar flight signature...

It is unbelievably good to see Han (Harrison Ford) and Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) back together again — and later rejoin Leia (Carrie Fisher), C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) and the rest. There’s a sense of weight to those relationships that is impossible to fake because the audience is part of the love — to cite a rival franchise, it’s the difference between the emotional heft of *The Wrath Of Khan* and the emotionless waft of *Star Trek Into Darkness*. Here too there’s a sense of decades passed and battles lost and won, of old arguments half-healed

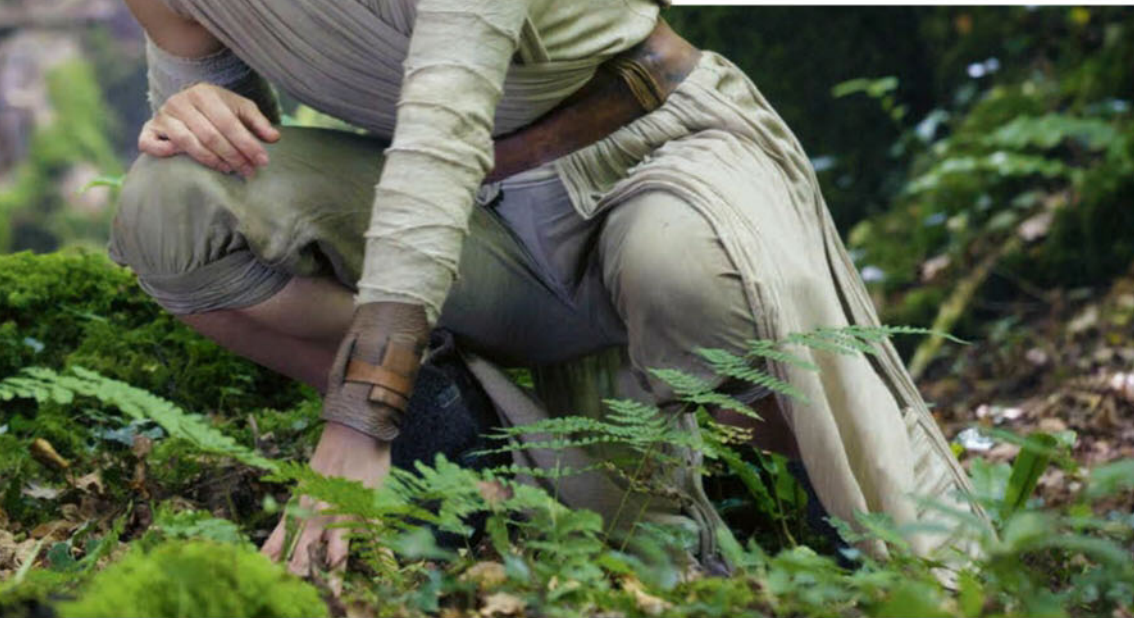
and old love still simmering.

The new characters don’t all get quite as much development as they should to match the existing titans. Finn is the most rounded, with Boyega retaining all the charisma he displayed in *Attack The Block* but upping his humour levels considerably. He’s clearly battle-shocked in his first taste of combat, and even in armour his body-language howls his terror and moral uncertainty. His growing confidence in his own capability is a glory to behold. Rey, however, is stuck in the goody two-shoes Luke role and underserved by a script that makes her tough but a little unfocused. She does grow during the adventure, maturing from childhood (look out for a homemade X-wing pilot doll in her

Top: Suddenly, Jar Jar Binks loomed into view.

Top right inset: Always remember: mirror, signal, manoeuvre.





home) towards a more powerful, more influential destiny. Poe has more fun than either, whooping with glee while executing some astonishing aerial moves and looking good doing it. Still, he's not hugely nuanced; he's basically just an awesome, awesome guy. Perhaps that's enough.

Against them there is Kylo Ren, the best villain that the franchise has ever produced. He's not just a worthy heir to Vader; he may be more interesting. Rangy to the point of being gangly, there's the sense of adolescence still clinging to him, his rages coming across as petulant rather than showing Vader's cold fury. This, you sense, is one messed-up kid — an impression reinforced by his struggle with the "seduction" of the light side. "The First

Order arose from the dark side," says Max von Sydow's Lor San Tekka. "You did not." And yet Ren is casually formidable, freezing a blaster bolt with a wave of his hand and halting opposition with a thought. He has the most interesting arc in the film, even more so than Boyega, and while he will most decidedly *not* be a fan favourite, he is an astonishing bad guy.

Ren stands alongside Domhnall Gleeson's General Hux, a sneer given human form, and commands the ruthless Captain Phasma (Gwendoline Christie). We don't see a huge amount of Ren's leader and mentor, the immensely awful Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis), but it's clear that he is a bigger threat than the Emperor was, and carries a much bigger stick. As Tekka says early

on, "Without the Jedi, there can be no balance in the Force" — and without Luke, there are no remaining Jedi. If Snoke is the universe's reaction to that, we're going to need a new Academy established quick-smart.

In the meantime there are battles to win and fancy flying to be done. You'll see the Millennium Falcon in action again, crash-landing and also crash-taking-off, which is a new one. For the bigger battles, Abrams largely resists the urge to amp up the speed of the X-wing/TIE Fighter dogfights as much as modern technology allows, and maintains a stately rush that the eye can still follow. His storytelling isn't always quite so clear: the balance of power between Republic, Resistance and First Order is left vague, and the First Order's aims are opaque even by the standards of evil megalomania.

Sometimes, too, the adherence to *Star Wars* past grates. Parts of the first half hour feel like a remix, from the plans hidden in a small, feisty droid to the rescue of a tortured but still witty prisoner from an evil authoritarian regime. It's all beautifully crafted, just a little too deferential to what has gone before. But then the new characters take shape and new elements emerge. By the end, this finds fresh ingredients to add to the *Star Wars* formula, strengthening and deepening it. The prequels this ain't. We can all breathe again. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT This is filmmaking on an enormous scale and it packs a planet-sized punch, launching a new generation of characters who — by the end — take a place next to Han, Leia and the rest. *Star Wars* is back, and this is just the beginning.



Carol



OUT JANUARY 14 / RATED M / 118 MINS.

DIRECTOR Todd Haynes

CAST Cate Blanchett, Rooney Mara, Kyle Chandler, Sarah Paulson

PLOT A chance encounter in a department store leads elegant Carol (Blanchett) and uncertain shopgirl Therese (Mara) into a forbidden romance in 1950s New York.

THE SOUNDS OF A TRAIN STATION

over black and then, what's that? A fence? A cage? No, it's a floor grille we open on — elegant and iron and covering who knows what. This is a film about entrapment and escape and finding out what is underneath the veneer — of society, of ourselves.

From *Strangers On A Train* to the various talented Ripleys, Patricia Highsmith's novels and short stories have proved fertile fiction for big-screen skulduggery for 65 years, but this is the first film adaptation of her second novel, *The Price Of Salt*, and atypical in that the

deaths are more of desire than physical. There *is* danger and violence here, but the emotional blows land heaviest. The film is measured and restrained and as muted as its autumnal colour palette but the little moments — the silences, the looks, the longing — build and build, to power a freight train of feeling.

Highsmith's story of a romance between two women was published under a pseudonym in 1952, so as to avoid scandal sticking to her. What was daring then should not now raise so many eyebrows, although Phyllis Nagy's screenplay deftly shows how convention can trap us all — regardless of gender or status or sexual orientation. As much as the film is about a story billed at the time as “a love society forbids”, it is also about simple separation and divorce — that loneliness and confusion. It would have been very easy for the makers to present Carol's husband Harge (the wonderful Kyle Chandler) as a villain, but we see that his actions come from confusion and desperation, rather than hatred. The film has some of its most poignant moments not in its central love but Carol dealing with her infant child — explaining, in a beautiful, sorrowful line, why she can't be with her: “Sometimes mommies and daddies just

Carol (Cate Blanchett) finds herself wrapped up in her feelings for another woman.

decide there isn't enough room for them in the same place at the same time.”

Todd Haynes's last big-screen story of '50s forbidden love was Douglas Sirk-tribute *Far From Heaven*, but the lack of irony or detachment here elevates *Carol*. Aside from a rather too knowing moment when a character, watching a film, talks of the difference between what people say and what they really feel, this is a straight, sincere picture (aided endlessly by Carter Burwell's sumptuous score). The decision to film on Super 16mm makes it, cleverly, feel both from another era and yet immediate. Characters are often eclipsed by edges — of doors, chairs, people — and beats pass where we can only imagine or anticipate how our lovers must be feeling. Blanchett is brilliant — she so often is easy to take it for granted — but Mara has the longer distance to travel, from confused girl to grown woman, and her versatility and sensitivity is simply stunning. She is very Other — “my angel, flung out of space”. But she is also Us. **NEV PIERCE**

VERDICT Mara and Blanchett make for an unforgettable couple in a beautiful film about longing, loss and the confusion and wonder of love.

The Big Short

★★★★★

OUT JANUARY 14 / RATED M / 130 MINS.

DIRECTOR Adam McKay

CAST Steve Carell, Brad Pitt, Ryan Gosling, Christian Bale, Marisa Tomei, Melissa Leo, Selena Gomez, Margot Robbie

PLOT An account of the 2008 banking crisis, focusing on the investors who saw it coming and who bet against the housing market ('shorting' it).

HOW DO YOU MAKE THE

financial crisis compelling? The challenge has largely defeated filmmakers. They've tried the personal tragedy (*99 Homes*), the documentary (*Inside Job*) and the ultra-serious recreation (*Margin Call*) — and while all had their strengths, they barely touched audiences not already interested in the disaster. But Adam McKay may have a better approach, by emphasising not just the criminality of the system but also its absurdity.

From the off, McKay bends over backwards to make this digestible. Ryan Gosling's breezy, arch narration casually ignores the fourth wall, and the cast is packed with charismatic superstars. Christian Bale is Michael Burry MD, the antisocial hedge fund manager who first sees the rot at the heart of the mortgage derivatives market. Soon Steve Carell's furious Mark Baum and his team take interest, partnering up with Gosling's wheeler-dealing Jared Vennett. They're followed by novice investors Jamie Shipley (Finn Wittrock) and Charlie Geller (John Magaro) — who are in turn guided by Brad Pitt's eccentric Ben Rickert. The film swings fluidly between

these three main groups, never pausing enough to drag.

To dissect the more technical aspects of the crash, McKay cuts to silly little skits with yet more big names. Margot Robbie, in a bubble bath, explains derivatives, while Anthony Bourdain cooks up a storm that parallels the bankers cooking the books. It still can't make everything simple — these financial models were designed to be impenetrable — but the tongue-in-cheek approach offers a strong beginner's guide. McKay also never loses sight of the fact that financiers are socially maladroit nerds who only *think* they're masters of the universe, "like someone burst a piñata full of white guys who are bad at golf", as one character puts it.

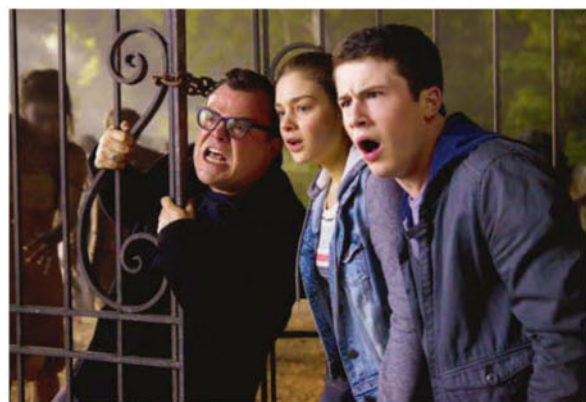
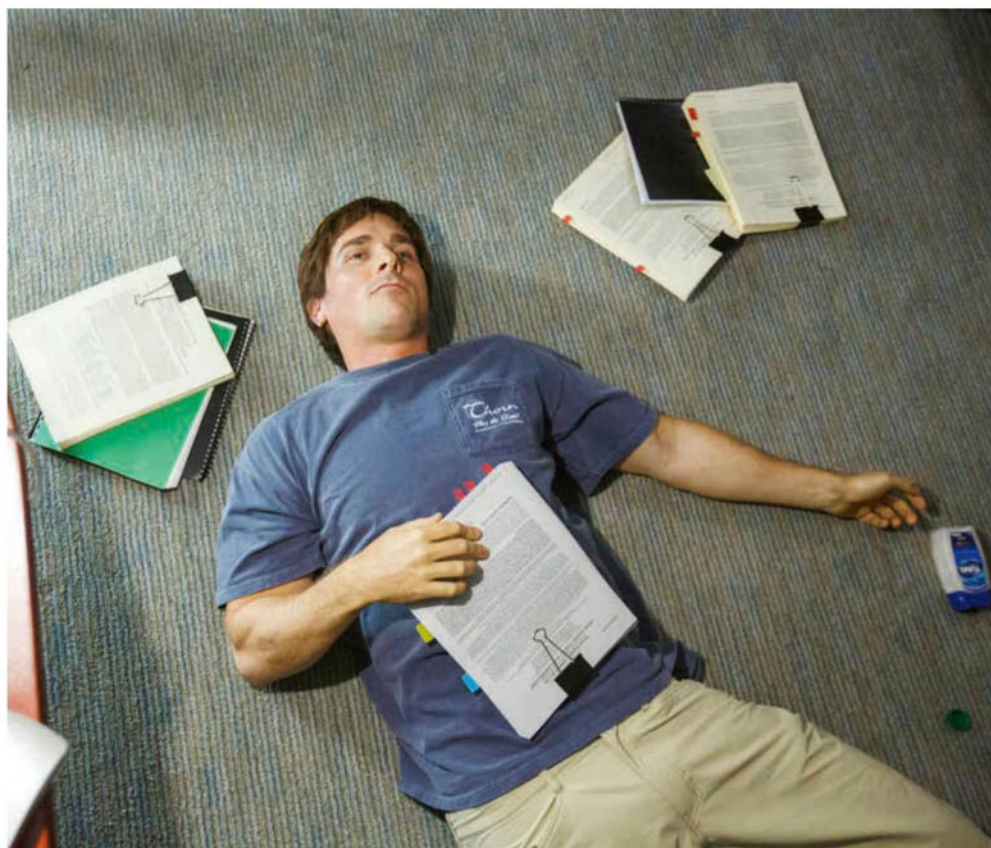
There's an obvious limitation in the fact that the film's protagonists are part of the system; even as they see the crash

coming, their aim is to cash in rather than prevent it. But compared to the reckless, grasping men who wrecked all our finances, they seem paragons of honour and probity — especially when their brilliant schemes become weights around their necks as the system stumbles on.

Though occasionally scrappy and arguably over-long, this is the best film yet to tackle the biggest financial disaster since 1929. It informs and outrages us without resorting to Michael Moore-style haranguing, and if it can just find a mass audience, could finally inspire some change. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT Witty, absurd and far more entertaining than it has any right to be, this could finally shed light on the financial crisis for those of us who found it all too boring to contemplate.

His clipboard was deceptively weighty.



Goosebumps

★★★☆☆

OUT JANUARY 14 / RATED PG / 103 MINS.

DIRECTOR ROB LETTERMAN

CAST JACK BLACK, DYLAN MINNETTE, ODEYA RUSH, AMY RYAN

Kids fiction behemoth gets the meta treatment when a sarcastic everyboy (Minnette) arrives in a new town and becomes entangled in the mysterious life of a fictionalised R.L. Stine (Jack Black). After unknowingly unleashing an array of wacky monsters from between the spines of Stine's *Goosebumps* universe, the boy

must help the author and his daughter (Rush) contain the surreal situation. A throwback to '80s children's adventure films clangs against an increasingly noisy CGI onslaught, but thanks to a fun and fluffy script that never takes itself remotely seriously and the odd genuinely amusing monster (and fleeting appearances by Amy Ryan), there's enough here to entertain children without driving parents too far up the wall. *Goosebumps* remains true to its source material — kooky, imaginative, disinterested in moralising, and scary with a tiny 's'. **JEREMY CASSAR**

DID YOU KNOW?

Will Ferrell was originally set to play the biological father in the film, with Ed Helms sought for Ferrell's role as the stepfather.



Daddy's Home

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED PG / 96 MINS.

DIRECTOR Sean Anders

CAST Will Ferrell, Mark Wahlberg, Linda Cardellini, Thomas Haden Church, Alessandra Ambrosi, Paul Scheer

Everything's dandy for Brad (Ferrell). Job at a smooth jazz station, loving wife, stepdad to two adoring kids. Then in swaggers Dusty (Wahlberg), the biological father: a surly, super-hung silverback intent on reclaiming his offspring. Director Sean Anders's emasculating dad-wars comedy lacks a killer set-piece, but still comes as a pleasant surprise. Reunited after comedy *The Other Guys*, Ferrell and Wahlberg have formed an improbable, viable, very funny double act. Ferrell's the wuss, Wahlberg the bad-ass; hackneyed personas maybe, but the chemistry clicks like LEGO. If it all ends in cornball reconciliation, the dumb, fuzzy smile it leaves suggests it's well earned.

SIMON CROOK



Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATING M / 96 MINS.

DIRECTOR Lisa Immordino Vreeland

CAST Peggy Guggenheim, Marina Abramovic

While researching this captivating documentary, director Lisa Immordino Vreeland unearthed a taped interview from which flowed her long-dead subject's velveteen voice. Magically, Peggy Guggenheim could now tell her own unique story. "Black sheep" of the American dynasty, Guggenheim was vital to 20th century art and, aided by Vreeland's lively montages and la-de-dah experts, she is astonishingly forthcoming. She was friend to James Joyce, lover of Samuel Beckett, and married to Max Ernst. Suffering bouts of nymphomania, she had "so many abortions". By smuggling canvasses out of Nazi Paris, she was "midwife" to Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. "Art," the doc claims, "was a mirror of her own strangeness."

IAN NATHAN



Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED PG / 86 MINS.

DIRECTOR Walt Becker

CAST Jason Lee, Justin Long, Josh Green, Jesse McCartney

The furry little singing critters are back for a fourth outing, hitting the road to stop guardian Dave (Lee) from tying the knot and introducing a horrible step-brother into their lives. The story is slight – albeit with a heartfelt message – and the humour broad. The kids are well catered for which makes a few wacky adult meta moments even more enjoyable – especially chipmunk Theodore (McCartney) nailing Sir Mix-A-Lot's *Baby Got Back* and Alvin (Long) bumping into the Prince Of Puke himself, Mr. John Waters, on a plane, and discussing *Pink Flamingos*! An earworm cover of Mark Ronson's *Uptown Munk* (see what they did there?) ensures your cynical toes will be tapping, even if you're trying not to have fun: "Don't believe me just watch." **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN**



Sisters

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED TBC / 118 MINS.

DIRECTOR Jason Moore

CAST Amy Poehler, Tina Fey, Ike Barinholtz, Maya Rudolph, James Brolin, Dianne Wiest, John Cena

The second movie for television's comedy queens Tina Fey and Amy Poehler threatens to become an ordeal, but finds its funny. Two bickering sisters are flunking middle age – Poehler's Maura is a shy square and Fey's Kate a cash-strapped wild child – until they mount one final blowout at the family home. The preamble is laughless, however, and neither character makes a whole lot of sense. Then, as Fey calls upon her resurrected peers to abandon their jaded adulthoods for something more fun, the movie and party flip into the PC-be-damned joys of *Animal House* or *The Hangover*. The sisters fall out, the house falls down, and everyone gets really filthy. And a fat man on coke is always hilarious. **IN**

DID YOU KNOW?

Peggy's father, wealthy businessman Benjamin Guggenheim, went down with the *Titanic* in 1912. His body was never recovered.



The Danish Girl

★★★★★

OUT JANUARY 21 / RATED TBC / 120 MINS.

DIRECTOR Tom Hooper

CAST Eddie Redmayne, Alicia Vikander, Ben Whishaw, Matthias Schoenaerts

PLOT Einar Wegener (Redmayne) is a painter happily married to wannabe artist Gerda (Vikander). After her model falls through, Einar poses in silk stockings and satin slippers, setting Einar on a path to her true self: Lili Elbe.

TOM HOOPER HAS MADE A career out of tackling subjects in which audiences have an active investment before buying a ticket, be it itinerant soccer managers (*The Damned United*), the Queen Mum (*The King's Speech*) or dreaming a dream of times gone by (*Les Misérables*). It may start in 1926, but *The Danish Girl* nails a zeitgeist-y hot-button topic of transgender issues led by (but not limited to) Caitlyn Jenner. It's a beautifully mounted, restrained picture but no less moving for it. Einar/Lili's body is biologically male but on the inside she is female. Her true self can be captured in

a painting but not in a mirror. The gulf between these two positions is heartbreaking, and it is this space *The Danish Girl* rewardingly explores.

The screenplay, by Lucinda Coxon and based on David Ebershoff's novel, takes its time establishing Einar and Gerda Wegener's happy marriage, the disjunct in their careers as artists (Einar is acclaimed, Gerda isn't), with only hints of what is to follow (Einar runs a hand absent-mindedly along a row of women's clothing). Things heat up after Einar, encouraged by Gerda, attends a bohemian party as her newly formed alter ego, "cousin Lili". She gets a nosebleed after being chatted up by Ben Whishaw's charmer, Henrik ("You're different from most girls"), but the experience is revelatory.

What follows are two intertwined stories. The first is about how Einar transitions to Lili, studying women at the market or at a Paris peep show, becoming a whizz at make-up and getting beaten up, before undergoing an operation that will bring her body in line with who she really is. Redmayne's fine bone-china features are prime movers in all of this being convincing but so is his performance, reticent, vulnerable and acutely observed. It's less flashy than *The Theory Of Everything* but no less satisfying.

Artists, lovers, friends:
Gerda (Alicia Vikander) and
Lili (Eddie Redmayne).

Yet the second through-line, how Gerda copes with this, is even more gripping. Initially she is curious and playful, helping her husband dress up and experiment, but at the point where you feel she would explode, she proves astonishingly supportive towards her partner's plight. Vikander eats this all up with a spoon, by turns energetic, winning, raw and compassionate. Between this, *Ex Machina* and a sparky turn in *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, it seems she can do anything.

Cynics may bash the approach for being too conventional for the adventurous subject matter (compared to last year's *Tangerine*), but Hooper's filmmaking is impeccable, flitting between beautifully bleak Scandinavian landscapes and oddly framed close-ups of Redmayne's angelic face. The director has an equally firm grasp on tone. Rather than duck the big scenes, such as Einar's revelry at first holding a dress, Hooper plays them with delicacy and tact. The result is absolutely intoxicating.

IAN FREER

VERDICT Redmayne's transformation may grab the headlines but it is Vikander's touching turn that steals the show. Sedate, certainly, but *The Danish Girl* is touching, timely and exquisite.



Steve Jobs



OUT FEBRUARY 4 / RATED M / 122 MINS.

DIRECTOR Danny Boyle

CAST Michael Fassbender, Kate Winslet, Seth Rogen, Jeff Daniels

PLOT In the lead up to three product launches, spread over 14 years, we plunge into the mounting crises, both personal and technical, that confront Apple head Steve Jobs (Fassbender).

STEVE JOBS IS THRILLING.

Which should sound counter-intuitive. Isn't this a film about a man who made computers? Operatic in scope, breathtakingly articulate, and held firm by a snake-charmer of a central performance, it is, in fact, another ambitious reckoning with a flawed American titan; a sister parable to the Zuckerberg-autopsy *The Social Network*; an intricate, dazzling, zeitgeist-lassoing *Citizen Kane*. Or, if you prefer, *The West Wing* in the tech sphere.

The hook is a backstage drama, *Birdman*'s twitchy Broadway neuroses neatly divided into three acts, each located just as Jobs (Michael Fassbender) is due to unveil his latest game-changer. In 1984, Cupertino buzzes with anticipation for

the launch of the Macintosh, the friendly-faced challenge to the supremacy of the PC. But behind-the-scenes he is assailed by breakdowns of all guises, including a wounded ex (Katherine Waterston) trailing a five-year-old daughter (Makenzie Moss) she claims is his. In a stunning rendition of Jobs's emotional sangfroid, he has constructed an algorithm to prove there is a 28 per cent chance she belongs elsewhere. Then his dead gaze flickers into life as the girl, named Lisa, takes to his new computer.

It's a repeated pattern. In 1988, an exile, Jobs prepares to launch his ill-fated NeXT system, while plotting revenge and dealing with Lisa pressing for the attention he lavishes on his computers. By 1998, the prodigal returned, he is about to establish Apple as chief catalyst of our cultural destiny by giving us the iMac. Later on Jobs chases an infuriated Lisa to a rooftop and points to her boxy Walkman. "We're going to put 500 tunes in your pocket," he reports, as if that makes things right. The iPod is already cooking in the brain of this man who unerringly grasped the interface between people and objects. It is the connection of people to people that was beyond him.

All of screenwriter Aaron Sorkin's virtuoso scene-construction and supercharged dialogue, drawn from Walter Isaacson's biography, electrifies the wilting biopic into grand Shakespearean tragedy.

Having Sorkin in full spate doesn't make it less of a Danny Boyle movie. Only a more mature, focused, theatrical Boyle. He lets the talk surge through long, dynamic takes. His camera roams the networks of backstage corridors, riding the currents of high-anxiety. During a boardroom flashback, as Jobs faces downfall, an apocalyptic deluge cascades down the windows. Each of the three eras is shot in time-specific stock. The electronic score follows suit. Everything configures as metaphor.

There's not a flat note in the performances, either. Kate Winslet exudes steadiness and sanity as marketing-guru Joanna Hoffman, Jobs's constant confessor. Seth Rogen is a fine Steve Wozniak, Apple's co-founder whinnying for recognition.

There is an amusing Venn diagram in the magnificent Fassbender playing Jobs between Macbeth and Magneto. Invoking rather than mimicking the nasal accent and stiff gait, he nails the mesmerising zeal and icy cruelty, but defies the film's search for conclusions. He leaves Jobs fascinatingly elusive, both genius and sociopath. The ultimate closed system.

IAN NATHAN

VERDICT Fassbender, Winslet, Sorkin and Boyle await Oscar nominations. But for all its relevance and grandeur, *Steve Jobs* is ridiculously entertaining. You might say, user-friendly.

Good Jobs: Michael Fassbender invents the modern world.



Room

★★★★★

OUT **JANUARY 28** / RATED **M** / 118 MINS.

DIRECTOR Lenny Abrahamson
CAST Brie Larson, Jacob Tremblay, Joan Allen, Sean Bridgers

PLOT A mother (Larson) and her son (Tremblay) live in a tiny room, but only one of them knows that there's a whole other world outside it.

BE WARNED, ROOM IS A wrenching watch. It's a story so abhorrent and seemingly hopeless that there may be times you don't want it to go on, but within its tight confines Lenny Abrahamson, with a script by Emma Donoghue, finds warmth and hope. It is, against all odds, uplifting.

Ma (Brie Larson) and Jack (Jacob Tremblay) live in a nine square metre space. To Jack this is the entire world, where objects — Table, Rug, Wardrobe — are the only one of their kind and anything outside is as intangible as heaven. To Ma, this is her prison, a cell in which she's been kept for seven years since she was kidnapped at 19 by a man who has raped her countless times and fathered Jack. But she keeps all these hard realities of life from her son. The brilliance of Lenny Abrahamson's

adaptation of Donaghue's Booker Prize-nominated novel is in making us see these two worlds as one, Jack's magic and Ma's horror, like oil and water, emulsifying into a twisted truth that helps both keep a grip on sanity.

Abrahamson's direction is astonishing, not just because he constantly finds new ways to see the room, keeping the viewer trapped in there but surprising us all the time, but for the performances he wrings from his cast. Larson has been threatening for years to truly break out, and *Room* should be the film to make it happen. She's so raw as to verge on unwatchable, the pain she conveys just too upsetting to sit with. Nine-year-old Tremblay gives one of the best child performances ever put on screen, utterly convincing as his world is cracked open. A lot of the credit for that has to go to Abrahamson. Very young child actors are only ever as good as their director.

Room asks an enormous amount of its audience, dragging you further into darkness in the journey to find some distant light. It's a mark of how well Abrahamson has told his story that by the end, which takes you to places once unimaginable, you'll likely be willing to go through it all again. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT Tough, but resilience is rewarded. If last year's larky *Frank* suggested Abrahamson was a director to watch, this makes him a director to be cherished.

Jacob Tremblay and Brie Larson in *Room*. World's biggest omelette just out of shot.

InCinemas



Point Break

OUT **NOW** / RATED **M** / 114 MINS.

DIRECTOR Ericson Core

CAST Teresa Palmer, Luke Bracey, Edgar Ramírez, Ray Winstone

A *Point Break* remake and nary a Keanu Reeves in sight? Whoaaa! Here the new Johnny Utah (Bracey) tracks X-treme sports lovin' crims led by the new Bodhi (Ramírez). Tubular!

The 5th Wave

OUT **JANUARY 14** / RATING **TBC** / TBC MINS.

DIRECTOR J Blakeson

CAST Chloë Grace Moretz, Liev Schreiber, Maika Monroe

Based on Rick Yancey's YA sci-fi series, this makes a bid for 'the new *Hunger Games*' as Chloë Grace Moretz goes up against waves of aliens. Not tubular.

13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers Of Benghazi

OUT **JANUARY 28** / RATED **TBC** / TBC MINS.

DIRECTOR Michael Bay

CAST Max Martini, John Krasinski, David Giuntoli

Taking a brief break from shape-shifting alien robots, Michael Bay directs this true tale of a security team scrambling to stay alive when an American Ambassador is killed at a U.S. compound in Libya. Cue, explosions.

The 33

OUT **FEBRUARY 4** / RATED **M** / 127 MINS.

DIRECTOR Patricia Riggen

CAST Antonio Banderas, Rodrigo Santoro, Juliette Binoche

More true life horror as 33 miners are trapped in a collapsed mine for a whopping 69 days.

Anomalisa

OUT **FEBRUARY 4** / RATED **TBC** / 90 MINS.

DIRECTORS Duke Johnson, Charlie Kaufman

CAST (VOICES) David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Tom Noonan

A stop-motion dramedy from the twisted mind of Charlie Kaufman (*Being John Malkovich*) already being touted as a masterpiece.



Suicide



ON-SET
WORLD
EXCLUSIVE

Suicide Squad isn't just a new twist
on the superhero-movie genre.
It is, as director David Ayer puts it,
"Comic Book Movie 2.0"

Orkbad

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN



Director David Ayer briefs Viola Davis in a briefing-room set. That's a lot of briefing.



OME MOVIE SETS HAVE A TEA trolley. *Suicide Squad* has a gun trolley. Pushed around Toronto's Pinewood Studios by a former SWAT officer named Mike, it groans under the weight of enough ordnance to recreate the final reel of *Commando*. This includes an M320 grenade launcher, equipped with "Day/Night Sight" for nocturnal use. A Chiappa Rhino revolver, customised with alternating "LOVE"/"HATE" motif on the chamber. And the colossal single-use M72 Light Anti-Tank Weapon which *Empire* has just been handed by David Ayer.

"Never aim at anything you don't intend to destroy," chides the Navy submariner-turned-Hollywood director, as we wobbly point the state-of-the-art cannon towards a gaggle of grips. He surveys the mobile armoury. "Do we have enough guns on this show? That one you got's really comfortable. But *this* is fucking sick."

The "this" in question is actually a person. In fact, it's Will Smith. Dressed

as super-assassin Deadshot, he's strolled over to see why an idiot is waving a bazooka around. Among the multiple firearms strapped to his body armour are a pair of wrist-mounted, gripless Glocks. Capable of spewing real bullets, they're triggered by Smith's thumbs via an innovative system involving air tubes and a pneumatic actuator. He's basically part-man, part-gun.

"Hey, we're going to a bad place where bad things are happening," Smith grins between sips of a bucket-sized banana smoothie. "We gotta stay ready."

Steered by Ayer, the man behind the MA15+-rated likes of *Fury* and *End Of Watch*, *Suicide Squad* promises a tougher, fresher take on superpowers. But its roots go back several decades. In 1959, comic book *The Brave And The Bold* #25, written by Robert Kanigher, first used the phrase "Suicide Squad" to describe a team of adventurers who battle dinosaurs and giants. In 1987, John Ostrander refined the concept: what if a group of supervillains were captured and forced by



Shooting a scene in Arkham Asylum. Note possibly psychotic teddy bear.

SQUAD FILES

The Joker

Aka Mr. J
Played by Jared Leto
Specialty Chaos

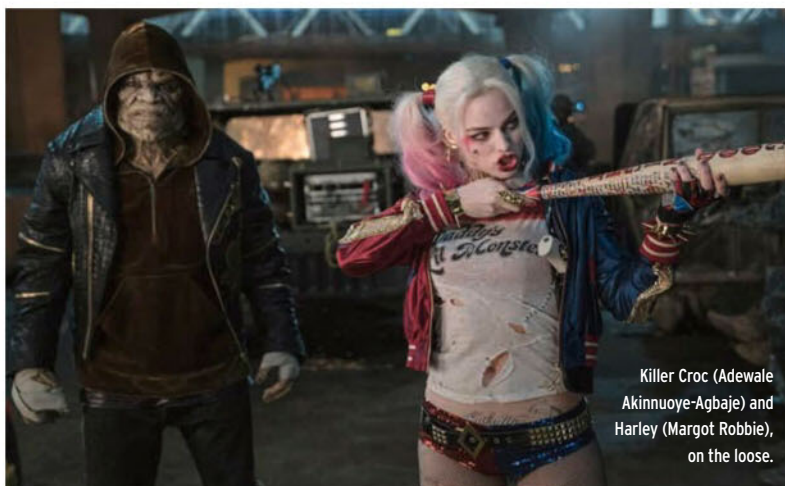
→ "I was just thinking," says Jared Leto at the start of his phone conversation with *Empire*, "that the Joker would probably just say, 'Fuck you,' and hang up." Fortunately, Leto is not the Joker. At least, not right now. It's already the stuff of legend, how the 43-year-old became Mr. J throughout the six-month *Suicide Squad* shoot. He sent bullets to Will Smith, a rat to Margot Robbie, a dead hog to the crew. He assigned Jim Parrack, the actor playing henchman Jonny Frost, random errands at all hours, including spray-painting roses black and filling a backpack with nine-inch nails. And he never once broke character, prompting Smith to tell us, "I've literally never met Jared."

"There was definitely a period of... detachment," Leto reflects. It's his very first interview about the role and we've caught him on tour with his band *Thirty Seconds To Mars*. Which explains his

unexpected location: Greece, wandering the Acropolis at 11pm. "I took a pretty deep dive. But this was a unique opportunity and I couldn't imagine doing it another way. It was fun, playing those psychological games. But at the same time it was very painful, like giving birth out of my prick-hole."

Spending night after night alone, Leto listened to gospel music from the 1920s ("I always get the sense that the Joker may be much older than people think") and read literature on shamans. His take on the clown (tattooed, with lurid green hair) is a live-wire nutjob. "It's something different," he promises. "If you don't break rules, you're not going to strike new ground."

We ask if all this Method Joking requires a cooling-down period. There's a quick burst of laughter – from Leto, Joker, or both. "I think I'll be cooling down for the rest of my life."



Killer Croc (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) and Harley (Margot Robbie), on the loose.

the government (in that first run, Ronald Reagan himself) to undertake insanely dangerous black-ops missions?

Since then, DC Comics has run many variations on the theme. Deadshot and the Joker's shrink-turned-mistreated-girlfriend Harley Quinn have been

mainstays of the unit officially known as Task Force X, while such oddities as King Shark (an actual shark), KGBeast (big, Russian) and Count Vertigo (makes people feel dizzy) have rotated in and out. But the notion of a movie didn't gain serious traction until May 2014. >

SQUAD FILES



Colonel Rick Flag

Played by Joel Kinnaman
Speciality Strategic command

"Flag is the highest-level operator working for the government," explains Kinnaman. "He's had lots of friends die and has killed many, many people." Tough, then, but tough enough to babysit the Suicide Squad? "Deadshot gives him the most problems. Harley is easily distracted, but up for following orders if it means destroying things..."



Killer Croc

Aka Waylon Jones
Played by Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje
Speciality Brawn

As a child, Waylon Jones was beset by a disease that gave him reptilian skin. He saw a psychiatrist. And ate her. "He's a cannibal with rage issues," says Akinnuoye-Agbaje. "Although he only eats the most talented people. He's picky." His signature move? The croc-inspired death roll. "It's absolutely brutal."




Diablo

Aka Chato Santana
Played by Jay Hernandez
Speciality Hellfire

Diablo is a former LA gang member who can summon infernal flames. "Most of these guys are happy to get out there and kill people," says Hernandez, "but he just wants to stay out of the fight." His Belle Reve cell is a giant, floodable metal tube: "I got water in my ears, nostrils and sinuses. But it looks great."





Dr. Quinzel, Medicine Woman:
Harleen (Margot Robbie) takes
a session with the Joker
(Jared Leto).

“We were in Michigan, where we’d just started shooting *Batman V Superman*,” explains producer Charles Roven. “We were figuring out our path through the expanding DC Justice League universe. Then David Ayer came in and pitched his take on *Suicide Squad*. It had this darkness and edge, while still tonally in the zone of what we’re trying to do with these movies. And it’s impossible that you could get a big tentpole picture from pitch to start of principle photography any faster than we did.”

While simultaneously editing World War II tank epic *Fury*, Ayer wrote the script at a furious clip. His first challenge: picking which Squaddies to enrol. “Between the old series and [2011 reboot] *New 52*, there are probably 100 characters,” he says. “I don’t know why, but the first I connected with was Harley. When you follow her story, it’s about her breaking free of the Joker and becoming this fully actualised, independent person. That really is a metaphor for everyone’s journey here.”

His second challenge: reinventing the Joker. In *The Dark Knight*, Heath Ledger played the clown as a wild-card loner. Roven, who also produced that film, describes Jared Leto’s new incarnation as “more social... A very successful and smart businessman, besides being a sociopath.” The character remains shrouded in mystery — *Empire* is politely barred from the set for a scene involving Leto and a huge rotating gimbal — but we do know the following: we’ll see him in Arkham Asylum; his trippy, fancy-dress-clad henchmen include a panda, a weeping baby and a giant eyeball; gonzo director Alejandro Jodorowsky was a design influence; and his costumes/bling were inspired by Mexican cartel bosses. “The Joker is the third rail of comic book movies,” muses Ayer. “There’s a power to that character, and by some freaking miracle, through the incredible things Jared has done and the photography and all the other millions of things that went into it, we’ve cooked up something transcendent. He’s scary.”

If Ayer has rebooted the Ace Of Knives, he promises the rest of the film will feel just as fresh. “You know, all these movies are about defeating the evil alien robot from fucking Planet X, before it destroys the world with its ticking clock. And who the fuck cares? But you do a story about struggle and isolation and people who have been shit on, that suddenly get thrown this lifeline... that’s not so bad. I like to think of this as Comic Book Movie 2.0.” >

June Moone (Cara Delevingne),
post-transformation, pre-shower.

SQUAD
FILES

Enchantress

Aka June Moone
Played by Cara Delevingne
Specialty Sorcery

→ If you recently stayed at a Toronto hotel and decided to hit the spa, there's a chance you've already met Enchantress. And if so, it was likely an encounter that sent you running back to your room, screaming. "I decided that her domain was a warm, steamy lair," explains Cara Delevingne, "so I spent a lot of time in the hotel steam room. Occasionally someone's come in and I've just been on the floor in the corner, crawling around and doing creepy shit. I go, 'Sorry, bit weird!' But I've freaked out a few people, that's for sure."

Eerie, unearthly, colossally powerful and adorned with nifty crescent-moon headpiece, Enchantress is not a member of the Suicide Squad. The character, who made her comic book debut in 1966 under the excellent billing 'The Switcheroo Witcheroo', is actually the alter ego of timid regular gal June Moone. "June is an

adventure-seeker who's always wanted some excitement," explains Delevingne. "And she gets what she wished for, but in a terrible way. At the start of the movie she discovers a cave and finds something within."

In the comics, Enchantress has been both a hero and a villain. It's unclear which she'll be in this movie. Her powers will draw the attention of Amanda Waller, but one thing's for sure: no-one can truly control her. "She's an ancient sorceress," Delevingne says. "A feral being. She's been trapped for so long and now she's finally let out."

During her four hours in the make-up chair each day, the actress had plenty of time to access her own inner Switcheroo Witcheroo. "I'd gather the accent, which is deeper and posher than June's. And I'd blast Nick Cave's *Red Right Hand*, that song about the devil. Also a lot of Megadeth. Just evil stuff."

NOW TOOLED UP WITH

kit from the trolley, the entire Suicide Squad have assembled, like an anti-Avengers, for a scene aboard a Chinook helicopter. Strapped into their seats and behaving, for the time being, are the dirty half-dozen: Deadshot (Smith), Diablo (Jay Hernandez), Boomerang (Jai Courtney), Slipknot (Adam Beach), Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) and Killer Croc (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje). Count Vertigo, sadly, didn't get the call.

Eyeing them suspiciously are a small cadre of Navy SEALs, led by straight-arrow commander Rick Flag (Joel Kinnaman). And as the wind and smoke machines are cranked up, one final figure strides up the ramp. It's a last-minute addition to the team: the mask-wearing, sword-packing Katana (Karen

Fukuhara). Unlike the others, who are being coerced via nanobombs injected into their necks, she's a volunteer.

"She's got my back," Flag informs the Squad. "I'd advise not getting killed by her — her sword traps the souls of its victims."

Harley extends her hand, perky and smirky. "Harley Quinn, nice to meetcha. Love your perfume. What is that: Stench Of Death?"

The joy of *Suicide Squad* will lie in the interaction between these disparate reprobates, some of whom are metahumans with amazing abilities, some of whom are just good in a scrap. If a hit with viewers, each could potentially get a solo movie, or take on Batman in one of his forthcoming films (as spoiled by on-set iPhone snaps, the Caped Crusader will make a Caped Cameo). This movie, more even than *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, will open up the DC universe like never before.

"It's a monumental task just to track each character's story," says Ayer. "But



"And then you shoot five more guys..." Ayer has a word with walking gun Will Smith.

SQUAD FILES Deadshot

Aka: Floyd Lawton
Played by Will Smith
Specialty: Marksmanship

→ *Suicide Squad* marks the second movie to imbue Will Smith with superpowers. Though while *Hancock* gave him flight, super-strength and eternal youth, this time he's just a really, really damn good shot.

"On *Bad Boys* I trained in Miami with special-ops guys," Smith says, "but this is a whole other level. It took 20 minutes to get all the equipment on, and the wrist-Glocks were kinda like a bra strap – it took a while to master. But the psychological component was much more difficult. I had to learn to get comfortable with the idea of killing a stranger."

Deadshot may be a hitman, but he's a hitman to root for. "As the movie opens, he has a really big career score," Smith says. "He's looking to turn over a new leaf with his daughter after the hit, but it goes wrong. It goes terribly, terribly wrong. And it lands him in Belle Reve for life." Instead of retirement, he finds

himself stuck with Earth's most gnarly ne'er-do-wells. "Harley is the biggest troublemaker, but Deadshot's actually eyeballing her a little bit. There's a pretty ragged romantic triangle there."

His first big ensemble piece since *Independence Day*, Smith describes the cast as having "magical chemistry". He even wielded an ink-gun to tattoo "SKWAD" onto Joel Kinnaman's arm at the wrap party. "Will has many, many talents, [but] tattooing is not one of them," commented Kinnaman below his Instagram pic. "It was like watching a drunk baby fly a helicopter."

Smith howls with laughter at the memory. Though he admits he found it difficult keeping up with some of his co-stars. "Listen, I think I'm in my twenties, but on *Suicide Squad* it got really clear that I'm not. Like, nobody went to sleep. Ever. I was like, 'Guys, please, somebody take a nap!'"



Amanda Waller has a nefarious dinner. Note Ayer alum David Harbour, right.

the good news is that these guys all leap off the screen."

Already the source of much obsession from her animated series, comic book and video game appearances — Kevin Smith even named his daughter after her — Harley Quinn is destined to hit big. "She's the fan fave," says producer Richard Suckle. "Funny, crazy,

scary... You can't come up with enough adjectives to describe all the different things you see her do. And Margot is just incredible."

But several others look capable of stealing the show. Not least the taciturn Killer Croc, a brute with the complexion, temperament and diet of a crocodile. *Empire* watches as Akinuoye-Agbaje >

performs one of the character's big gags (literally), spewing chunks of half-digested goat-meat (actually Fruit Roll-Ups, prunes and juice) onto the floor of the Chinook. He then scoops some of the vomit back into his mouth, causing the hardened Navy SEALs to blanch. For real: Ayer hadn't given them a heads-up on the puke.

"Aw, man, that is *nasty*!" laughs Will Smith, watching playback. "That one's for the eight-year-olds..."



VERY SQUAD NEEDS

goals. But if Ayer is happy to accept the men-on-a-mission-movie comparisons — "It's *The Dirty Dozen*, but with comic supervillains" — he's more circumspect when it comes to the mission itself. What he will share is this intel: "They're after a high-value target that they have to go in and rescue. When they make the attempt, they realise that's not the end."

When asked who or what his expendables are facing, the director quips, "Donald Trump. His hair has magical powers." Rest assured that there will be a surprising threat, something even more formidable than a Republican comb-over. But of more immediate concern to the Squad is their boss. "Fuck good versus bad," says Ayer. "Bad versus evil is a lot more interesting. And Amanda Waller is the worst there is."

How scary can Amanda be? Plenty scary. Waller is the wetwork specialist who runs Task Force X, and two-time Oscar nominee Viola Davis plays the role to the hilt: an iron fist in a titanium glove. "She's relentless in her villainy," says the actress. "When you look at her, there's nothing that seems dangerous. Her only power is her intelligence and her complete lack of guilt. I read a great book called *Confessions Of A Sociopath*, which was frightening but very helpful. Read it with a glass of wine or two!"

And in case you were wondering, yes, Davis also got to visit Mike and his gun trolley. "I can now shoot, unload, reload and shoot again, all in six seconds," she beams. "High-powered weapons are *very* exhilarating."

SUICIDE SQUAD IS OUT ON AUGUST 4 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.



SQUAD
FILES

Harley Quinn

Aka Dr. Harleen Quinzel
Played by Margot Robbie
Specialty Mischief

→ Impish bad girl Harley Quinn, the bubble-blowing princess to the Joker's Clown Prince of Crime, is already one of fiction's most cosplayed characters. That's only going to increase after the release of *Suicide Squad* — and Margot Robbie feels a bit guilty about it. "When I got the role I started looking up Harley costumes online, with my mum sitting next to me," she laughs. "She was like, 'My daughter is going to dress like a prostitute!' There are a lot of angry mothers out there!"

Suicide Squad's Harley is tamer than some of the ones that strut Comic-Con, but still eye-catching. It's an instantly iconic ensemble: bracelets ("I've got scars all over from them"), fishnets ("They rip all the time") and towering boots ("They take 20 minutes to lace up"), plus dyed hair, face tattoos and the very hottest of hot pants. "Everything

that looks cool is also the most difficult to wear," Robbie says. "But when I came on set without it all on, everyone was like, 'You look weird. Go get dressed — this is freaking us out!'"

It could be the role of a lifetime for Robbie, who gets to play both Harleen Quinzel, the doctor assigned to probe the Joker's psyche, and Harley, the result of his ghastly seduction. The actress has also been the main focus of Mr. J's off-screen affections. "Jared sent me a rat," she says. "A black one with cute white paws, like he's wearing little socks. I named him Rat Rat and my assistant Soph and I would sit down on the carpet with him and all drink tea. I passed Rat Rat onto Jai [Courtney], then he went to one of the girls in wardrobe. He's now with Guillermo del Toro." Expect a casting announcement for *Hellboy 3* any day now.



SQUAD FILES



Boomerang

Aka George 'Digger' Harkness
Played by Jai Courtney
Speciality Curved throwing tools

An Antipodean brawler with an array of ludicrous weapons and a beer-holster, Boomerang is bringing the Down Under thunder. "He's an absolute bogan, in the purest sense," laughs Courtney. "Dave's first instruction was, 'Find your inner shitbag.'" You'll never see his drone-boomerang coming. Or going.



Slipknot

Aka Christopher Weiss
Played by Adam Beach
Speciality Ropes

Yes, his superpower is knots. And yes, you should be afraid. "He's formidable," says Adam Beach. "He can climb anything. And he hangs people for a living. I joke that he was caught strangling Wonder Woman." How good is Beach at ropes now? "I downloaded this app called Grog Knots. Now I could tie up a horse."



Katana

Aka Tatsu Yamashiro
Played by Karen Fukuhara
Speciality Swordplay

Katana serves as Rick Flag's bodyguard. "She has morals and codes," says Karen Fukuhara. "She can also slice through hundreds of people without taking a breath." Her look contains hints of her past: her blade's called Soultaker, and the Japanese characters on her sash translate as, "I weep thinking of him."

Patient may experience mood swings: Harley Quinn amuses herself in her cage.

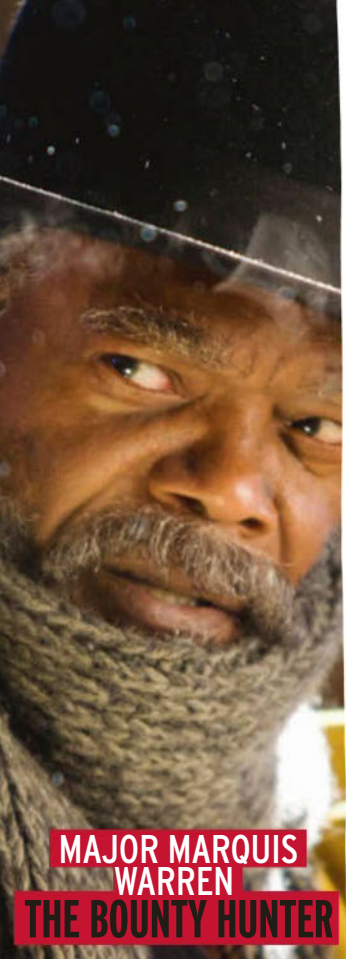




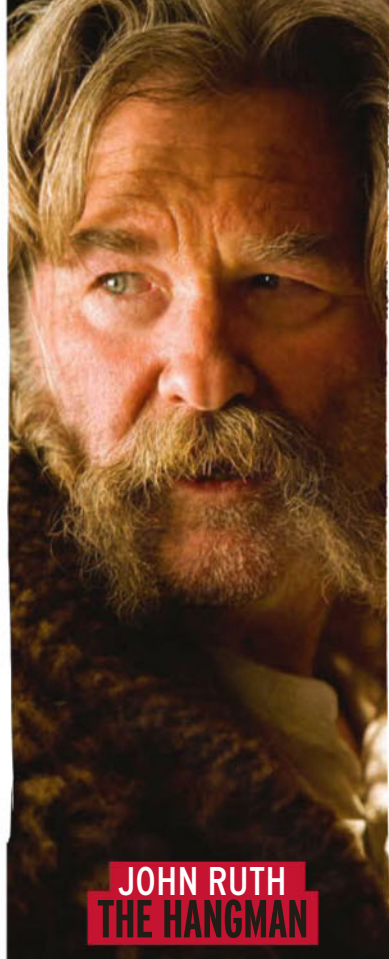
QT ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Empire ventures to the wild set of Quentin Tarantino's 'mystery-thriller Western' *The Hateful Eight*... And spends four days waiting for an audience with the man himself

WORDS DAMON WISE



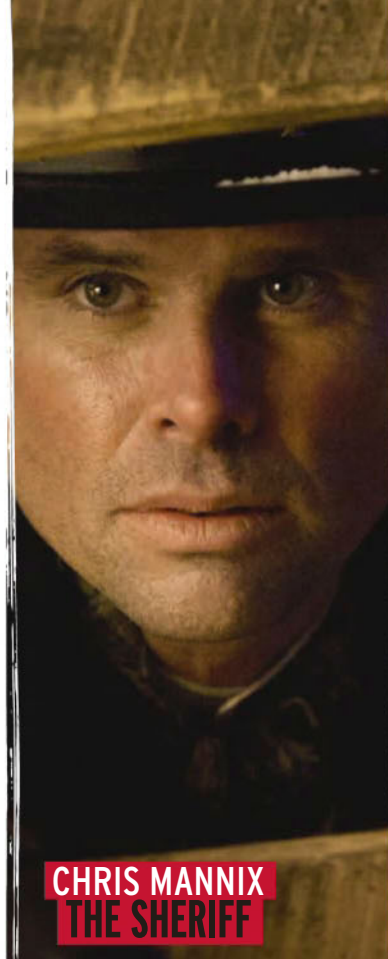
MAJOR MARQUIS WARREN
THE BOUNTY HUNTER



JOHN RUTH
THE HANGMAN



DAISY DOMERGUE
THE PRISONER



CHRIS MANNIX
THE SHERIFF

Day One

LAST STAGE TO TELLURIDE

Blood and snow: these are the only two things you can be sure of in Quentin Tarantino's eighth movie — a film he announced quietly, after months of speculation, with an ad that featured the striking image of a six-horse stagecoach leaving a splash of crimson on a stark, white background. Tarantino has filmed in snow before, in *Kill Bill* and *Django Unchained*, but for *The Hateful Eight* he wants to conjure up a seething winter's hell, a genuine, raging, terrifying no-VFX blizzard.

But on a February afternoon when *Empire* arrives at Canyonlands Field Airport, Utah, a three-hour drive from the film's shoot in Telluride, Colorado, the weather is troublingly beautiful. As the sandstone arches of Moab become the stately mountains of Colorado, there is snow on the ground but none in the air. So little is happening that Samuel L. Jackson, one of the Eight, has been given the week off. Indeed, the situation will later become so desperate that the cast and crew attempt a pagan sacrifice, throwing wooden skis onto a bonfire in prayer to Ullr, the Norse god of skiers. But for now, while Tarantino and his crew sit on standby for the first flake of snow, *Empire* is taken to a ski lodge and asked to wait. And as the production waits on snowfall, so we will wait to speak to QT.

In the meantime, things get interesting. We're handed a script with the title page torn off in a familiar

hand-scrrawl that reads "Chapter One: Last Stage To Red Rock". We are sworn to secrecy. This isn't the script Tarantino nearly abandoned in January 2014 after gossip website *Gawker* leaked it, or the version used at Tarantino's live on-stage reading in Los Angeles the following April. This is the new version, the one Tarantino dangled in front of potential buyers at this year's American Film Market. "There are five chapters," explains producer Stacey Sher. "For a certain period of time, people could only read chapters one through four, then people on the crew slowly got chapter five — but it didn't have the ending of the movie."

The reason for all this secrecy is that *The Hateful Eight* is the director's first mystery-thriller. It starts with bounty hunter John Ruth (Kurt Russell) bringing in criminal Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh) to stand trial in Red Rock. Along the way he meets two strangers, Major Marquis Warren (Jackson) and Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins), who claims to be a sheriff. These four make up half of the titular gang, who will assemble at the supposedly snowbound Minnie's Haberdashery, where things heat up.

It's unusual for Tarantino to be this cagey with his scripts. This one, though, went out into the world before he was through with it. "Quentin's never been a person who's shy about sharing his work," says Sher. "But what he *didn't* want to share was a work in progress, and every artist deserves the right to guard their creative process. So it felt like a violation to him."

Day Two

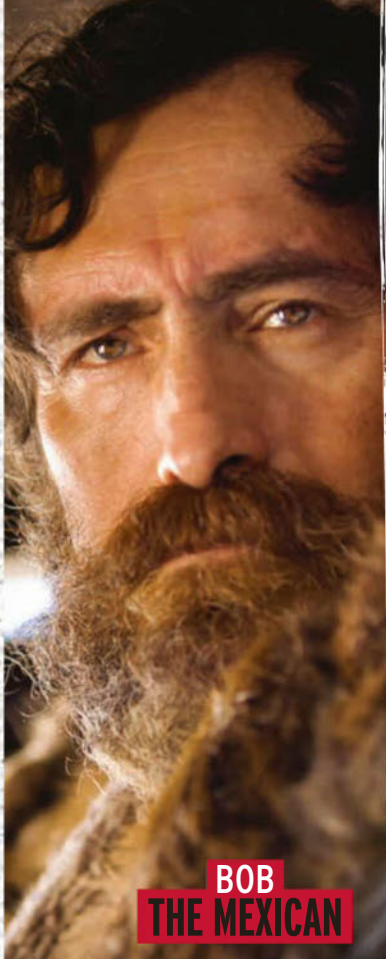
SIX-HORSE JUDY

The Steaming Bean on the main drag is a coffee house that sounds so much like a Quentin Tarantino joint that it comes as no surprise to find him in there, wrapping up a chat with one of his heads of department. It becomes swiftly evident he is about to leave. "Come over and see the dailies," he offers, heading for the door. And with that, he's gone.

Sitting nearby, mercifully, is Zoë Bell. She's more used to punching, roundhouse kicking and neck-snapping than twiddling her impressive thumbs, but Tarantino's longtime stuntwoman and *Death Proof* star is actually enjoying her downtime.

The Hateful Eight is Bell's fifth movie with Tarantino and the third in which she plays a character rather than a stunt double. "I don't carry a single gun in this one," she notes. Not one of the titular Eight, Bell is Six-Horse Judy, so named because she drives a six-horse carriage.

"I got the script the day it got leaked," she remembers, being one of the few to receive it directly from Tarantino, "so then it looked like it wasn't going to happen. But it was kind of a cool progression, because then he went on to the idea of doing the staged cast read-through." She remembers the live reading that the director put on at LA's Ace Hotel in April of last year using a version of his second draft, which has since undergone major changes. "I was in a room with Sam, Kurt and Bruce Dern and all these people, going through the



BOB
THE MEXICAN



OSWALDO MOBRAY
THE LITTLE MAN



JOE GAGE
THE COW PUNCHER



GENERAL SANDY SMITHERS
THE CONFEDERATE

script, watching Quentin workshop with these legends. I was super-comfortable with the script before I ever realised we were going to make a movie out of it.”

A month or so later, Tarantino called. As he told a press conference in Cannes, the knife-in-the-back wound had “started to scab” and the project was back on, using practically the same team she’d read with. Deftly sketched in the script as “a young female Calamity Jane type, dressed in buckskin”, Judy is one of the few characters without a hidden agenda. “Six-Horse Judy’s obviously tough,” she says. “But the way he described her, I knew exactly who she was. I knew which part of *me* he was referring to: the childish, bouncy part. She’s certainly not the comic relief, but she’s definitely a bit of mood relief.”

Over the road at the 150-seat Masons Hall cinema, above the hardware store, producer Shannon McIntosh has installed a 70mm projector. The kit is enormous, with huge cans of film piled in the hallway, and the venue is surprisingly full. McIntosh and fellow producers Sher and Coco Francini take the back row; Michael Madsen, who plays redneck cowpuncher Joe Gage (one of the Eight), has brought his son; and Tarantino sits with his DP, Robert Richardson. Everyone here is, by now, used to the sight of the director laughing wildly at his own dialogue, as if hearing it for the first time.

The images on the screen are positively luminous, with a warm, golden glow. This is Ultra Panavision 70 (“The

original IMAX,” notes Francini), and though you might expect such a format to be used primarily for mountain ranges, ravines and rattlesnakes, it makes for truly striking close-ups and reaction shots. The footage we’re watching comes from the early hours of the intrigue. In one scene, Tim Roth’s Oswald Mobray delivers a crisp, eloquently witty speech about the “thirst-quenching” properties of frontier justice. Tarantino roars with laughter. “Do you like the way Tim’s channelling James Robertson Justice?” he enthuses in *Empire*’s general direction.

Day Three

THE COWBOY AND THE MEXICAN

Michael Madsen has made three films with Tarantino, four if you include biker flick *Hell Ride* — which he does. The actor is an imposing figure in a cowboy shirt and Stetson, his eyes obscured by Ray-Bans. But underneath the tough-guy exterior, Madsen is a pussycat; he has a warm smile and soft, chubby skin that gives us a hint of what the middle-aged Mickey Rourke could have looked like. His hotel is up in Mountain Village, three kilometres above sea level, and the bar where we meet has spectacular views.

“I just wanna say one thing,” he begins, *à propos* of nothing. “When Budd pulls his sword out in *Kill Bill*, on Budd’s sword it says, ‘To my brother Budd, the only man I ever loved — Bill.’ And I’d like to start by saying I have that sword. And there should be one from me to Quentin. Let’s face it: I wouldn’t have had a career

if it weren’t for him. I’d have been dead and buried a long time ago if it weren’t for Quentin. My life would have taken a bad turn. He’s a fuckin’ genius, man.”

Madsen’s Joe Gage is a strong, silent cowboy type who claims he’s on his way to spend Christmas with his mother. “When I first read it, I wanted to be John Ruth [*the Kurt Russell character*],” he admits. “I remember thinking, ‘Hey, Quentin, I’m John Ruth, man. Who’s this Joe Gage? I don’t wanna be the cowboy fella, man!’ But then I realised Joe Gage is probably the best role in the film.” Madsen, you see, is a huge fan of Steve McQueen, and he saw that this was just the kind of role McQueen would have played. “Steve, he didn’t like to do explanation. He’s just gonna be the guy that sits there, and you think, ‘What the fuck is going on in that guy’s mind?’ I’m much better that way. I don’t wanna have a lot to say.”

Taking the gondola 545 breathtaking metres back down to Oak Street Plaza, a stiff drink is required. So we head to the Esperanza restaurant on the main drag, where Demián Bichir orders a drink in his native tongue and the barman is impressed. “Good Spanish, sir!” he nods. Bichir is taken aback. “Aw, yeah,” he deadpans. “Er, that’s my thing.”

The Mexican actor came to the production recommended by Robert Rodriguez, who directed him in *Machete Kills*. Surprisingly, he claims never to have been a big fan of Westerns before this. “But Quentin introduced us to this world, or at least he introduced me. >



He sent me a few DVDs and I kept watching them and discovering more. *Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, *Red River*... I got hooked."

He sees *The Hateful Eight* as a very human drama, despite its genre dressing. "The fascinating thing about this story," he says, "is that these guys are exactly the way we human beings are. We have our fantastic sides and our terrible sides — this duality. We cannot only be good or bad but interesting and funny. That's the way life is... The devil is always disguised as a really charming person."

Bichir's character is Mexican caretaker Bob, but it is impossible to discuss Bob's role without getting into spoiler territory. "I hope you don't get this the wrong way," he says, "but I have a hard time trying to explain my character. But..." He grins. "Bob is one of those eight motherfuckers."

Day Four, Volume One:

SEVEN CONVENE AT MINNIE'S

The Schmid Family Ranch is a Centennial Farm — a property continuously owned by a single family for 100 years or more — on Wilson Mesa, 16 kilometres west of Telluride. Ordinarily it is beautiful, but the sight that greets us is authentically grim. Snow that has fallen in recent weeks is melting, turning the hillside into a morass of sludge and mud that brings to mind *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. Like the envisioned elements, Tarantino remains elusive. So, after calling in at the costume truck to borrow a set of ice grips, we are directed to Walton Goggins's trailer.

The part of Mannix makes up for the actor's bittersweet experience on *Django Unchained*, in which his role, as Billy Crash, shrank in the final cut. "My collaboration with Quentin may not have been fully realised for the audience to see," he says generously, "but it didn't take away from my personal collaboration with the man. *Django* really changed my life as an artist, and that collaboration led to this opportunity."

The Hateful Eight, he thinks, picks up where *Django* left off, in a sense. "Quentin always says something with his material that is often masked by humour and these visually stimulating shots. But I think he's saying something important with this film. For me, it's a war crimes tribunal. Every participant, with the exception of one, is guilty of one atrocity or another. And we're all judge, jury and executioner... Everyone will pay, whether physically or emotionally, for the crimes that they've committed."

By this time, news comes that Tarantino has abandoned his quest for snow and rescheduled to continue shooting interiors. We are finally allowed onto the set — an extraordinarily detailed log cabin, plus outhouse and stable, built by Yohei Taneda, who created *Kill Bill*'s House Of Blue Leaves. This is Minnie's Haberdashery, where around 80 per cent of the film's events — give or take the odd cutaway to events that flesh out certain backstories — will unfold. Like a pimped-out version of *Reservoir Dogs*' warehouse, Minnie's is a huge, timber rest-stop-slash-trading-post filled with arcane bric-a-brac, where Tarantino is directing Russell and Leigh in a scene that takes place after their arrival. Seven of the Eight are here. To recap: John Ruth (Russell), Daisy Domergue (Leigh), Bob (Bichir), Joe Gage (Madsen), British hangman Oswaldo Mobray (Roth) and Confederate general Sanford Smithers (Dern), with stuntman Clay Donahue Fontenot standing in for Jackson.

Russell is a whiskery varmint trying to fix himself a cup of coffee while handcuffed to a deadpan psycho, much to the amusement of the others. John Ruth wasn't originally written for him, he says — there simply came a point when Tarantino called and said, "I'm hearin' your voice here." He was happy to accept, first for the live read, then for the movie.

"John Ruth is one of those bombastic forces that has gone through his life having learned to live by his wiles," Russell muses. "He just crashes through everything. He's not as smart as he thinks he is — he's like a man who took a high dive in a low well. He's been chained to this woman for a week, so he's probably had zero sleep. He's reaching his wits' end. He's extremely paranoid about what might be occurring at all times, so he's more than a bully, he's a bombast. A bull in a china shop."

He says that, despite the era and the remote location, *The Hateful Eight* has a lot in common with *Reservoir Dogs*.

"It's pure character, and once you move inside Minnie's, primarily you're in one room. But the room is *big* and the people in it are *big*. I think what we're all enjoying as actors is just finding the tonal changes that go with what he's saying. You're gonna laugh. But you're also gonna think, 'Holy shit. Are you kidding me?'"

Day Four, Volume Two:

TARANTINO AND I

The set of Minnie's Haberdashery is as close to being in the 19th century as you

THE GREAT INDOORS

QT MOVES THE NORMALLY OUTDOORSY WESTERN INSIDE, BUT IT'S BEEN DONE BEFORE, TO SUPERB EFFECT...



Rawhide (1951)

Outlaws planning a gold robbery fake over *Rawhide*, a watering stop on the stagecoach route, holding employee Tyrone Power and passenger Susan Hayward hostage. Eventually, Power turns the tables and mounts a one-man mission to harry the crooks. Yes, it's the Western precursor to *Die Hard*.

Johnny Guitar (1954)

Nicholas Ray brilliantly used a limited budget in this bizarre, cheapie Western, restricting most of the action to interiors — primarily a huge, two-floored saloon — by necessity, but also ensuring his meagre setting was packed with fantastic characters, most importantly Joan Crawford as bar-owner Vienna.

Rio Bravo (1959)

John Wayne, Dean Martin, Walter Brennan and Ricky Nelson hole up in the town jail after arresting the murderous brother of a powerful cattle baron. Howard Hawks's template for many siege stories — he did it all again in

El Dorado, and John Carpenter retooled the premise for *Assault On Precinct 13*.

Big Deal At Dodge City (1966)

Poor farmer Henry Fonda gets into a high-stakes poker game only to suffer a heart attack when he's dealt a seemingly unbeatable hand. His anti-gambling wife (Joanne Woodward) gets in the game to retrieve the family's life savings. Brilliantly scripted by Sidney 'The Hustler' Carroll, with a succession of ingenious twists and great character acting.

Alias Smith And Jones: Night Of The Red Dog (1971)

In this second-season episode of the TV show, former outlaws Heyes (Pete Duel) and Kid (Ben Murphy) find themselves snowed in in a cabin all winter with partners in a fabulous gold strike. They start playing cards... and wagering their portions of the gold dust. Another great gambling-themed Western, with an added claustrophobic edge.

KIM NEWMAN





Samuel L. Jackson's Major Marquis Warren backs into Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins). **Below:** QT and Tim Roth compare hands.



Roth's Oswaldo Mobray and Walton Goggins's Mannix come to blows. **Below:** Six-Horse Booty.



could get. There are no heaters, and in the absence of real snow, a smattering of the fake variety flutters past the windows. There isn't one square metre that isn't filled with detail. You can see through the walls. Back in those days the wood wasn't joined together perfectly. Snow comes in through the cracks.

And here is Quentin Tarantino talking with DP Robert Richardson about how to light a scene involving a roaring log fire, when lunch is called. With little ceremony, he signals it is time to talk. "In the Tarantino theme park," he says, taking in the set as we sit at a long, wooden table, "there definitely will be a Minnie's."

It's been a year since the script was leaked, and the betrayal is still raw. "I was devastated," he says softly. "I was devastated. Because it wasn't a work to be seen. The ending wasn't really *the* ending, it was just *an* ending. And the fact that it was somebody close who screwed me felt really bad."

Did he ever find out who leaked it? "It's one of six people."

Fittingly, this Agatha Christie element lends itself rather well to the plot. *The Hateful Eight* isn't so much a whodunnit as a who-will-do-what, a riddle that bubbles away throughout the film. Though this is his first crack at a mystery-thriller, he claims it didn't require a change to his writing style, an intuitive process that reached its peak in *Inglourious Basterds* when he suddenly 'realised' that his characters were going to kill Adolf Hitler. "I didn't know who the bad guy, or bad *guys*, were when I started. I waited for them to reveal it to me. I didn't do the mystery thing where you figure out who did it and then you go backwards. I wanted to find out myself too."

As Goggins hinted, this is a story where nobody is quite what they seem. "Everybody's got a big past," says Tarantino. He sees the film as having more in common with '60s Western TV shows like *Bonanza*, *The High Chaparral* or *The Virginian* than it does with big-screen oaters. "On those shows, maybe Brian Keith or Charles Bronson is the guest star, and Trampas or the Virginian is helping them out. They usually have some big chequered past that's revealed at some point in the story. And it's usually not 'til the end of the episode that you realise they're a good guy or a bad guy. I always found that really interesting. So I thought, 'Let me take eight of those characters, but without the good guys to balance it out, so you don't have any moral compass that you

can fall back on. Let's take eight of those sketchy guest-star characters, have them be played by the same kind of cool, groovy actors, then trap them in a room and have them hash it out.'"

Though it would seem to be a pure genre exercise, *The Hateful Eight* stands to be the director's most powerful screenplay to date. Following, historically, almost directly on from *Django Unchained*, its questions about racism, violence and justice in a post-slavery society are explicitly relevant today (Tarantino's later presence at an anti-police brutality march in New York is no coincidence). That, though, is the only connection, apart from a single line of dialogue about black bounty hunters and the in-joke that Django's coat is hanging on the wall. "It's political overlap, I think, more than anything," Tarantino says.

He is effusive about how Westerns better reflect the time in which they were produced than any other kind of movie. "I mean, the '50s Westerns had a very '50s Eisenhower kind of an aspect about them. And then in the late '60s you had the hippie Westerns and the anti-Westerns. And in the '70s it was almost like we had the Watergate Westerns: now we're gonna rip down everything we believed about these heroes. All of a sudden you're getting these fucked-up stories about Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday and Jesse James. All the Tyrone Power stuff goes out the window."

He doesn't hesitate to analyse his own Western along these lines, even if he insists it's unintentional. "It really kind of reflects that whole Blue State/Red State divide that exists in America at this time. Everyone nowadays just keeps saying, 'Well, the country's never been as divided as this since after the Civil War.' Alright, well *that's* when *this* takes place."

The result is another extraordinary story that starts big and homes in on a tense, claustrophobic focal point, turning the screws on the audience until the tension can do nothing but explode. It may come packed with big ideas and social commentary, but this couldn't be more QT. "When I wrote the La Louisiane scene in *Inglourious Basterds*, I thought, 'Wow, I just wrote a 20-minute version of *Reservoir Dogs* with Nazis!'" says Tarantino. "And I feel that way about this. Except this time it's with cowboys."

A stately two weeks later, a blizzard hits town.

THE HATEFUL EIGHT IS OUT ON JANUARY 21 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 32.

OSCARS

2016

From front-runners to dark horses, over the next 25 pages we reveal the biggest, boldest awards contenders in town



HELL

Or High Water



This year's Best Director **Alejandro González Iñárritu** reveals his 2016 bid: *The Revenant* — whose extreme location shoot is as much a survival story as the film itself

WORDS DAMON WISE

Everyone in Hollywood has a story about *The Revenant*. The sixth feature by Alejandro González Iñárritu has already entered modern movie mythology as one of the most difficult shoots ever embarked upon. Many of those stories paint the director as a deranged, deluded Napoleon figure driven insane by his recent Oscar glory, given he'd won for *Birdman* while this latest project was already struggling in the wilderness.

The word "hellish" comes up a lot in these tales: remote locations exhaustively researched and then abandoned on a whim; a producer banned from the set; actors stretched to breaking point by conditions that plunged to minus 40; a stuntman dragged naked behind a horse; primitive facilities; and an impatient, ungrateful megalomaniac director demanding *more, more, more...*

But when *Empire* visits the 52-year-old Mexican at his offices on Olympic Boulevard in Santa Monica during August, there is no wild glint in his eye. Instead, Iñárritu calmly introduces some scenes from the film that's caused such fuss. It is the story of Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), a trapper who was supposedly eaten by a bear and left for dead by fellow hunters in the 1820s.

The result, alongside Quentin Tarantino's 70mm Western *The Hateful Eight*, which takes place in the same century, will be one of the most talked-about technical achievements of 2015. Shooting only in natural light, using long, steady takes, it moves from autumn to winter as Glass tracks down the men who deserted him. Looking back, Iñárritu thinks now, it was a challenge that stopped him getting too caught up in the Oscar whirlwind for *Birdman*. Every so often he would fly to LA to shake hands, raise a cocktail and pick up an award. Then he'd be back on a plane to the middle of nowhere, pursuing his wild dream.

"I was so submerged in the shooting of the film," he recalls, "that when I had to come back, it was great to have some

drinks, celebrate. It was a great ride. But I had to go back and keep working, and my mind was very much into the film. I lived my *Birdman* experience through the filter of that fucking winter."

He remembers being on a podium somewhere and receiving a text telling him that his latest location had just been flooded. "Receiving problems while you are celebrating is a strange thing," he says. "But in a way, it was healthy. I could have been swallowed up by that madness. In some ways I escaped the harshness of the shoot and at the same time I was not swallowed up by the frivolity of the awards. It was a good balance."

I NTERESTINGLY, *THE Revenant* began five years ago, before *Birdman* was even an idea, let alone a script. It was originally pitched as an adventure story, but Iñárritu wanted to unpick all that. "The storyline, the spine, was very clear and very simple," he recalls. "But what I was fascinated by were the possibilities — that environment, that landscape, that time in the world. The early 19th century was extraordinarily interesting, and I thought it would have a lot of elements that would resonate very much with what's happening now."

The key to this was a book called *Here Lies Hugh Glass: A Mountain Man, A Bear, And The Rise Of The American Nation* by Jon T. Coleman, a deconstruction of pioneer myth. "I was fascinated by that," says Iñárritu, "and I tried to use what *really* happened to this guy and give it a context of real adventure on a human scale, not this >

Frontiersman Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), beset by nature and betrayed by 'friends'.



Director Alejandro González Iñárritu and star Leonardo DiCaprio.



“Leo touches so many notes of emotion without one word. That is unprecedented.”

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLES IÑÁRRITU



Tom Hardy (as treacherous git John Fitzgerald) takes aim.



Will Poulter's Jim Bridger has much to answer for.

stupid glorification of the superhero. I wanted to explore what was going on at that time, which was the beginning of capitalism as we live it. These guys were serving the purpose of an industry that was basically the main economic resource of the United States at that time, which was killing animals and selling fur hats to women in Europe.”

To tell the story, Iñárritu chose digital for the first time in his career, using the 65mm ALEXA camera. His decision was born of a purely practical concern. He only wanted to use natural light, but shooting on film would have meant it was too dark by 3pm. Whereas digital delivered an extra 90 minutes of light.

But light was just one of his problems. “It was an extremely challenging shoot,” he admits, with some understatement. It took Iñárritu five years to find the perfect locations, which not only had to look spectacular, but also provide suitable terrain to mount horse chases and battle scenes — one of which quickly expanded from involving 60 cast members to 200. The demands of the shoot required meticulous planning and huge chunks of rehearsal time. But Iñárritu couldn’t prepare for everything. “People get sick, or the cameras shut down because of the cold, or you get so frozen you cannot move your fucking feet. Everything takes triple time.”

You might wonder why he’d want to put himself, and his crew, through that. Iñárritu sees it all as a necessary part of finding the right tools to achieve his overall vision and style. One tool, he says, “was to use natural light in order to get the complexity and the beauty of the landscape without adulterating it, without manicuring it, without pasteurising it.” Another was to employ his signature long takes, which made *Birdman* so visually remarkable, “to let people really get into characters’ minds and try to get people to relive and experience that world in the best way possible, the most pure way. Not by fragmentation or extreme artificiality. Like a sonic painting — that’s what I wanted to create.”

THE FOOTAGE IÑÁRRITU shows us is unfinished — the sound mix is windy and there are some crude, temporary digital effects — but *The Revenant* is undeniably epic. Like a mash-up of *Soldier Blue* and *Saving Private Ryan*, the first thing we see is a long scene in which a group of trappers, led by Tom Hardy, is ambushed by Native Americans. It has soul and scope, like vintage Terrence Malick, and shows off





"I used natural light to get the complexity and beauty of the landscape."

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLES IÑÁRRITU

those stunning locations for which Iñárritu searched so hard.

Although the film is set in the US, the shoot mostly took place in Canada. The States, Iñárritu says, couldn't provide him with the necessary vast, untrammelled wilderness, being a nation now of dammed rivers and parks. "Obviously there are the most parks in the US," he adds, "but it's almost impossible to shoot there. There is no permission. You cannot touch the fucking grass, it's almost ridiculous!" So instead he sought out truly remote places. "My obsession was to go to locations that nobody had seen, that didn't feel like man had touched. They are absolutely virgin in that sense."

Though beautiful, these locations

seem so cruel and unforgiving. It is difficult to believe that Hugh Glass could have survived there after such a brutal mauling. "That's what made his story so interesting," exclaims Iñárritu, "because the odds are 99 per cent against him. But I think the job of the filmmaker is to make the improbable probable. So it's an exploration of that: what conditions allowed this guy to survive, even when he is absolutely broken in every sense?"

He admits to being amazed by what his lead actor achieved in the role. "I think Leo did something that I have never seen," he says. "It's a very silent character, everything is body language. That is really impressive. He touches so many notes of emotion without one word. That is unprecedented, I think."

Left: Stag weekends were the real deal in the 1820s.

Above: Iñárritu schools his cast in anguish and pain.

By way of explanation, Iñárritu asks his editor to show *Empire* another scene, in which a seriously crippled DiCaprio emerges, eyes blazing, from a shallow grave. It's a bravura performance, the type that wins awards. But as Iñárritu reminds us, the actor was also drawn to the project by broader concerns, not just the chance to finally bag an Oscar. "As you know, he's a big environmental advocate," the director says. "I think we share the same point of view."

The environment is an especially big concern to him today because, when we meet, his film still isn't finished — despite having an original wrap date back in March. "We have to go back to Ushuaia in Argentina to look for the last scene," he says, "which we lost because of global warming." They'd gone to Calgary expecting snow, but none fell. "It was the hottest winter in the history of Canada. That's the reality of global warming. There were bees, flies and flowers... it was very scary."

Global warming, he believes, can be traced back to the reckless profiteering of Hugh Glass and his paymasters. "They never understood how to interact with nature. Look at the forests — they turned the fucking trees into fucking tables. They had no respect for the fucking birds and the animals — they killed them and turned them into *hats*. That was a very big mistake, I think."

Warming to his theme, Iñárritu sheds his calm exterior, revealing something perhaps closer to the raging director depicted in those reports from *Revenant's* shoot. "Look at the consequences of capitalism," he spits. "One per cent of the people in the world possess 40 per cent of the wealth. The rules of the market have swallowed everything. You can measure the success of everything by how much money it made. In 2008, the fucking world went bankrupt. And in two days the [*world's*] leaders saved the fucking banks. If nature was a bank, we would have saved it. But nature is just collapsing. In 20 years we'll be flooded. And nobody's doing anything, because it's not profitable."

It's a subject that Iñárritu hopes his film will open our eyes to. Forget all the rumours, the firings and the fights. "I don't care how much of a challenge it was," he shrugs, "Nobody *cares* about that. The most important thing is, if you see the beauty of what we did, and the value of that, on the screen, then I'm happy. If we achieve that, we've succeeded."

THE REVENANT IS OUT NOW.



The **EMPIRE** interview

THE HARD WAY

WORDS IAN NATHAN PORTRAITS NICOLAS GUERIN

Leonardo DiCaprio has worked with some of the greatest living directors: Scorsese, Spielberg, Nolan, Cameron. Now he adds Alejandro González Iñárritu with *The Revenant*: his toughest challenge since *Titanic*. Will Oscar follow?



M

MIDWINTER IN NORTHERN CALGARY CAN REACH 40 below. So cold that even your eyeballs hurt. Try crawling into a freezing river there, while swathed in a 68kg bear pelt. It's like an electric shock knocks the breath out of you, jamming your nervous system. Now try staying in character. With a wry smile,

Leonardo DiCaprio admits it was pretty tough. Making Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant* was a titanic quest for the authentic. If it was humanly possible, it wasn't faked.

A few weeks previous to *Empire* meeting with DiCaprio, Iñárritu showed him a working cut of *The Revenant*. The film relates the tale of raggedy frontiersman Hugh Glass — this “campfire legend” of the 1820s — who, at a pivotal juncture, is mauled by a grizzly bear and then helpfully buried alive by his companions. Donning the hide of that fallen bear, Glass embarks on a journey of unimaginable hardship across the wilderness to catch up with his former comrades. Settle the score.

DiCaprio, famed for windbags like Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf Of Wall Street*, is still trying to find adequate words to express what he saw. There has been no film like it, he keeps repeating, comparing Iñárritu with Scorsese (the highest compliment he can pay). “From an audience perspective, that bear sequence alone is going to be cinema history,” the actor exalts. “It stimulates other senses. You can feel the breath of the bear, the sweat of the character...”

Sitting in a warm New York hotel, surrounded by the spires of civilisation, he talks with calm authority. Then you remember he has been acting since his early teens, and at 41 has 28 feature films to his credit, including some of the most

Above: Seeking revenge as real-life frontiersman Hugh Glass in this month's *The Revenant*.
Opposite: On location with *Revenant* director Alejandro González Iñárritu (left).



FOOTNOTES

❶ Ironically, *Īñárritu* had the film blessed in a Native American ritual before the film started. "We all sort of joined hands together," says DiCaprio, "and there was a prayer blessing the movie and the land."

challenging and dynamic cinema of recent times. From teen idol to Scorsese's muse, DiCaprio has experienced just about everything the movie world can summon up to challenge a favoured son, with the exception of that elusive Oscar win. Still, he freely admits he has never made a film like this before. And as far as he's concerned, it's the film that matters.

If *The Revenant* is an extraordinary measure of the creative stamina of one of the leading filmmakers in the world, it is also a shining emblem of the drive within its leading man. DiCaprio seeks "cinema history". The list of his collaborators reads like the case for auteur theory: not only the Mexican wizard, but Cameron, Spielberg, Tarantino, Nolan, Luhrmann. And there's that special relationship with Scorsese. You don't see many romantic comedies on his CV, and he remains unswayed by the lure of the superhero elect. DiCaprio can only see one way: no pain, no gain. The impossibly famous superstar determined to be an artist.

It's a simple place to start, but just how hard was it to make *The Revenant*?

No-one is going to lie and say it wasn't an incredibly difficult film to take on. The sheer logistics of the locations were challenging in their own right. Add to that Alejandro's technique of rehearsing for months beforehand, Chivo's

[cinematographer *Emmanuel Lubezki*] all-natural-light technique, the poetry and existential aspect they brought. Alejandro and Chivo work with this meticulous dance of the camera and the actors, and what they accomplish in the movie is pretty profound. And then coupled with the 10,000 lb gorilla which was nature... If you want to immerse yourself in the natural world, have that almost be a character in the film, you are beholden to what comes.

And what did come?

There were these extreme weather patterns. We had a day that was 40 below and the camera wouldn't even work and actors couldn't act because it was too cold and we couldn't feel our own hands. That coupled with times where we had eight feet of snow out in the vistas that disappeared within five hours because of a heat wave. We were dealing with unprecedented weather events that have never happened in Canada's history ❶. Nature was sending us this crazy message. All the preparation that you can do as an actor is constantly changing because you are adapting to the environment. I have never been part of a film like it in my entire career. It was tough on everyone and everyone worked really hard to accomplish this goal. I don't know how many movies will be made like this again, to tell you the truth. But it is all up there on the screen. >

Do you feel comfortable in nature?

Look, I love nature. I am an environmentalist. I love going to these exotic, amazing places. These mountain men were just a different era of human beings, like primal cavemen living off the land. All this western territory was like the Amazon rain forest. The Northwest and the Southwest territories had not been inhabited yet. There were really no historical records. There is very little to know about these people. There are no photographs, only etchings, journals of fur trappers. Hugh Glass embodies the American spirit in the wilderness, the will to survive, and the triumph of man succumbing to nature and also prevailing ❷. So it was like doing a science fiction movie, almost.

How easy was it to get into the head of Hugh Glass?

This was a unique movie for me because it was almost like mime work. I have so little dialogue, almost nothing. I looked at that as an interesting challenge as I have played so many incredibly articulate characters. This was a lot about the preparation beforehand, but it was also about trying to react to my surroundings and this man's will to survive and this vengeance that is the current of the performance. But done as if nobody was watching, as well. I learned everything I possibly could. Not only about muskets, but how to trap animals, how to create fires, how to survive among the elements. You planned as much you can, then you have to throw yourself into the environment. The main thing you find out in the cold is that your hands are victim beyond anything. I made a choice early on to not have gloves, as I don't think he would have them. Every day was a challenge to keep my hands warm, because they would lock up. I enjoyed it... I mean I enjoyed that challenge.

How did your fellow cast members cope with the extremely adverse conditions?

The actors Alejandro put in there, he wanted to disappear into the landscape, for it to feel incredibly authentic. But it was hard on all of us. From Domhnall [Gleeson] to Tom Hardy, we were basically bearded and hairy from a year living in log cabins. The entire crew, we were all just a bunch of hairy men living up north, trying not to go crazy.

As an actor, do you ever reach a point where you think, "I can't do this, this is my limit"?

Sure, absolutely. There are moments when you are sitting amongst nature and creating something and you are in awe of what is in front of you, and there are moments when this stuff is incredibly hard to pull off and it makes you not want to work sometimes. But when I say that to myself, I have to slap myself in the face and say, "Are you out of your mind? You've been given this opportunity." It is important not to get too spoiled. Because it is a gift, it really is. People who have had long careers do look at it that way, as a gift. And if you treat your position in the industry with a flippant attitude it will come back and bite you in the face. If you build it, it will come, so to speak. If you want to be difficult, if you want to be pessimistic about the opportunity you have — and I feel blessed in mine — I think the industry will find a way to make you not work.

In terms of physically taxing shoots, how did *The Revenant* compare with *Titanic*?

[Laughing ruefully] They are pretty neck and neck. I couldn't choose between them. They are apples and oranges, though. One had a lot of stages; the other was in nature. But the film time was equivalent... Let's put it this way, they were both difficult for different reasons. Although, both had cold water.



That whole *Titanic* era must seem like a strange dream now...

It was certainly a surreal point in my life. You become this sort of independent actor and then you are in this one film that for whatever reason connects with people on a worldwide level. And you are at this young age and you really don't know how to react to it. My immediate reaction was to stop everything and take a break and let it settle down. But it has affected my personal life ever since. I don't think you ever get used to the type of attention certainly the media has on you. At the same time, I have absolutely nothing to complain about — it has given me these crazy opportunities. I mean, I am getting to work with Alejandro Iñárritu on this film, the type of film that the studio system doesn't make that often, if ever. So I celebrate this opportunity.

Early in your career there was talk of you doing a *Spider-Man* film with James Cameron. How close did you come to making that?

Not very close, but there was a screenplay ❸. I know he was semi-serious about doing it at some point, but I don't remember any further talks about it. We had a couple of chats. I think there was a screenplay that I read, but I don't remember. This was 20 years ago!

Can you imagine what your career might have been like if you had made that movie?

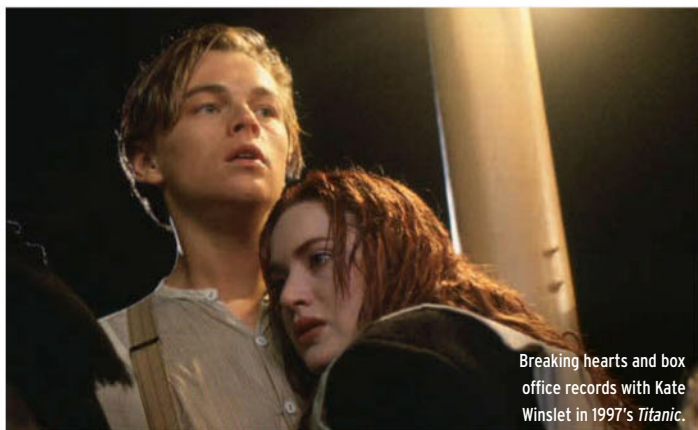
FOOTNOTES

❷ Hugh Glass is a genuine 19th-century fur trapper who was attacked by a grizzly. Before setting out after his fellow trappers, he set his own broken leg, and prevented gangrene in an open gash by laying it in a rotting log and letting maggots eat the dead flesh. He was previously portrayed by Richard Harris in *Man In The Wilderness* (1971).

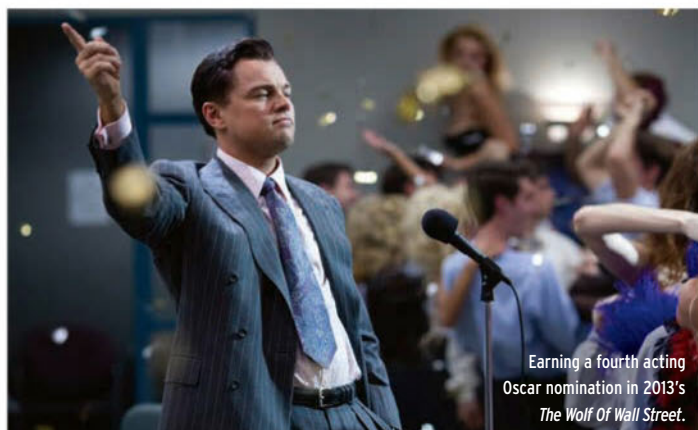
• CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES



With early acting hero Robert De Niro in 1993's *This Boy's Life*.



Breaking hearts and box office records with Kate Winslet in 1997's *Titanic*.



Earning a fourth acting Oscar nomination in 2013's *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

I'm not sure anything would have changed. I have the same outlook on movies that I had when I was 15. For whatever reason, whatever I saw from cinema's great history, I said to myself, "Hopefully I will do a movie as good as some of these that I have seen." But I would have been happy to be a working actor, period. Holy shit, I am so lucky. It was only working on *This Boy's Life* with De Niro that gave me the foothold ❶. I would be a complete twat to waste the opportunities that I have been given. To me it is a responsibility in some ways. I don't want to miss out on the opportunities to work with great artists. But the type of movies I want to do has been the same since I was 15.

Is it fair to say you could work with anyone you want to?

Listen, nothing is ever easy. Some films are very difficult to pull off. Both *The Aviator* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* were screenplays that I developed for years. I found the financing for them and luckily got Marty to do both of them. Other ones have been developed by other people... Each one presents its own challenge.

Still, the list is impressive: Spielberg, Nolan, Luhrmann, Tarantino... What do those experiences mean to you?

Having worked with Marty, who was a master of film history, Spielberg is essentially the same way, he just chose to do different

types of movies. They are both essentially professors of film history. Spielberg has a great love of actors, and gives to actors as Marty does... Chris Nolan is an absolute genius, somebody that has incredible stories locked in his head. As an actor it is amazing to try and dig into his psyche and draw something out during pre-production, because when you get there, you start to see things unfold in ways you never imagined... Baz envelopes you into his world. The way he investigates the Bard, the way he dissects *The Great Gatsby*, the way he is meticulous about everything, not just the actors, but the wallpaper. It is inspiring to be around, I truly love the man... ❷ Tarantino, again: massive cinephile. If Scorsese has seen every movie ever made up until 1980 — which is the rumour — Quentin's seen every B movie ever made up until today. He reminds me of Marty in a lot of ways, too. He's one of those few directors out there that people truly go to because of his name — there are few directors that become household names synonymous with their own style. And Alejandro, in my opinion, has now become one of them.

You mention Scorsese a lot. Does your relationship with him remain the most significant thing in your career?

It is like we inherently know each other, but we go off and do our movies. He just did *Silence*, and I did this other film. To me it has been these great chapters in my life, but sometimes we don't speak for long periods of time. It has been beautiful. Even in the hardest films we have done together, and it has been miserable at times, that misery loves company. And there is nobody I would rather be doing these sequences with, and being on set with, than him. He has been so much a part of my adult life. I don't know how I have been blessed with the opportunity to work with him, and I hope to do it a lot more ❸. He has taught me so much about not only cinema's history, and what it is to be an artist and an actor, but the importance of movies.

Do you have a checklist of directors you want to work with in the future?

No, I don't have a checklist. There are a lot of directors I would love to work with — Paul Thomas Anderson, Ang Lee — but to me it is always primarily about the character and the screenplay, and it must be something I feel like I can be of service to. I am completely open to doing a romantic comedy, but I never think about what would it mean to popular culture. All I care about as a cinema lover is whether I can get lost in that world. So you want to work with the best. It takes real talent to be able to pull off stylistic choices. To be bold enough to work with great artistry, and not just work with a static shot.

Which surely sums up everything Alejandro set out to achieve on *The Revenant*.

What I love about him, and identify with — and it is the same thing that Marty has — is this feeling of being an outsider. He is from Mexico, and he has watched America's cinema history and he is here to make his mark, much like Marty was the New York filmmaker going to Hollywood. They both fight that much harder to achieve what they want. Alejandro is incredibly poetic and his reach is endless in terms of what he wants to accomplish cinematically. He's got this incredibly vivid imagination and he is incredibly stubborn about making sure his artistry is put up on screen. That is the sign of a great filmmaker. He also happens to be incredibly pleasant to be around, which makes it tolerable. But he's been this outsider that has now made his mark... When you see this film, you're going to have seen nothing like it.

THE REVENANT IS OUT NOW.

FOOTNOTES

❶ In 1993 Cameron wrote a 47-page 'scriptment', which potentially pitted DiCaprio's 17-year-old Peter Parker against Arnold Schwarzenegger's Doctor Octopus. It fell apart when Marvel went bust in 1996, but elements ended up in Sam Raimi's 2002 adaptation.

❷ When DiCaprio was nine, and said he wanted to act, his father took him to see Robert De Niro in *Midnight Run*, saying to his son, "You want to know what a great actor is? This is a great actor." DiCaprio still calls *This Boy's Life* his "seminal experience".

❸ DiCaprio once met with Luhrmann about *Moulin Rouge!* but was unsure about his singing voice. "It was me and him and a piano player, and we tried to sing a song together," DiCaprio recalls. "When I hit a high note, he just turned to me [and said], 'Yes, D, I don't know if this conversation should continue...'"

❹ DiCaprio has lured Scorsese into a sixth collaboration with an adaptation of Erik Larson's true story *The Devil in the White City*, about a serial killer who haunted the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. "I want to be in that one," DiCaprio enthused to *Variety*. "That one is real." He will play the killer, H.H. Holmes.

SAOIRSE RONAN

Putting away childish things in *Brooklyn*

→ SAOIRSE RONAN IS 21 YEARS old now, and feels it's about time people stopped expecting her to play teenagers. "I was really aware when I was about 19 that I didn't want to play anyone younger than myself. But it's all like, 'Do you want to play this 16-year-old who hasn't lost her virginity?' Not really..."

Ronan first gained attention aged 13 as Briony Tallis, the precocious meddler in Joe Wright's *Atonement*, a role which brought her an Oscar nomination. Then she impressed in *The Lovely Bones*, *Hanna* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, among others. Yet the hunt for a first adult role was tough, so when one finally showed up, she grabbed it like a life raft. "When *Brooklyn* came along I was like, 'Yes! Great! A 23-year-old? Perfect! Where have you been?'"

Ronan's role in *Brooklyn* is the sort an actress of any age would cherish. She plays Eilis, a young woman who travels from small-town Ireland to New York to start a better life during the 1950s. "I'd been looking for a script about an Irish girl for a long time," says Ronan. "But I didn't want one of those, as I call them, 'diddly-iddle stories', where it's the character who lives on a farm, never leaves the village and there's a drunk in the pub. God, I'm sick of that." *Brooklyn* appealed because, although it's what Ronan calls "Irish Irish Irish all through" its themes are universal, such as what it means to leave home and become your own person. "It's about how once you make that decision to go, you can never go back."

Festival screening reactions have tipped Ronan for an Oscar nomination. Regardless, she has already secured one victory: she's made the transition to adult star without a stumble. "I definitely think my years of playing children are behind me," she confirms. It's like she says: you can never go back. **OLLY RICHARDS**

BROOKLYN IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 11.

The ACTRESSES

Attracting much buzz for the Best Actress gong

BRIE LARSON

Fighting claustrophobia in the intense, intimate *Room*

→ “IT’S LIKE TALKING ABOUT getting married one day when you don’t have a boyfriend,” says Brie Larson about the Oscar chatter surrounding her stellar turn in *Room*. “It’s fun to talk about but it doesn’t mean anything yet.”

Based on Emma Donoghue’s bestseller, *Room* is a heartbreaker, with Larson delivering a powerful, touching, truthful performance. The title refers to the garden shed in which Larson’s Ma and her five-year-old son Jack (Jacob Tremblay) have been held captive for the entirety of the boy’s life. To dive deep into the role, Larson spoke to trauma specialists, studied accounts of sexual abuse — “You just become angry and upset but it became my fuel to have the stamina for a 49-day shoot” — and bonded with young Tremblay through the medium of “stormtrooper and Han Solo” LEGO figures. She also took cues from the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the 3.3-metre-by-4.5-metre set.

“It felt like clowns packed into a clown car,” she says. “Someone’s elbow

or butt was always in your face. It did create a sense of intimacy which added to the performances on the screen.”

Room arrives at an interesting point in Larson’s career. She has previously balanced lead roles in indie fare like *The Spectacular Now* and *Short Term 12* with smaller parts in the bigger-budget likes of *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*, *21 Jump Street* and *Trainwreck*. But, following turns for Todd Solondz (*Wiener-Dog*) and Ben Wheatley (*Free Fire*), she will take on lead duties against a 12-metre ape in *Kong: Skull Island*.

“People don’t have as much respect for those bigger movies as they should,” she says. “*Star Wars* is a big epic movie but it tells the same story as *Room* is telling. It is the same archetypes, the same journey. To me, doing *Kong: Skull Island* is no different. It’s exciting to know that I can tell a story that is going to be seen by more people.” **IAN FREER**

ROOM IS OUT ON JANUARY 28 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 43.



CAREY MULLIGAN

Making an impact in *Suffragette*

→ CAREY MULLIGAN BECOMES very impassioned when discussing *Suffragette*, which is appropriate for the subject matter. “This isn’t just some documentary on how the world was,” she says, shifting close to the edge of her seat. “It’s a look at where we are now. In Saudi Arabia, women are getting the vote in 2015, the same year we’re releasing this film. It’s insane.”

Mulligan plays Maud Watts, an Edwardian factory worker who is accidentally caught up in the women’s rights protest. Sarah Gavron’s film, written by Abi Morgan, shows that the fight for equality went far beyond peaceful protest. “I hadn’t realised the scale of what they went through,” says Mulligan. “When the suffragettes became militant they started throwing them in prison. Emmeline Pankhurst went to prison, I think, nine or 10 times. They experienced police brutality. They started going on hunger strike and they were force-fed. Women died because of it.”

Pankhurst, the leader of the movement, is not the focus of Morgan’s story but her presence, while minimal,

required an actress with a powerful presence. One whom Mulligan was thrilled to work with, even if only briefly. “Meryl Streep was always the dream, but none of us ever thought it would happen,” says Mulligan. “I remember Sarah calling me and neither of us could believe it. I said, ‘Right, we have to shoot this right now before she changes her mind!’”

While she’s not been the subject of Oscar attention as often as the much-garlanded Streep, this is hardly Mulligan’s first time. Her breakout role in 2009’s *An Education* made her an Academy Award nominee and BAFTA winner. Back then she was just a 24-year-old who’d been pushed from obscurity into becoming Britain’s next A-lister. “To be honest, I was overwhelmed by it all,” she says. She is, of course, far too British to be drawn on the possibilities of it happening again, but she certainly doesn’t look overwhelmed now.

OLLY RICHARDS

SUFFRAGETTE IS OUT NOW.



CAROL

LOVE

*Women
In*



How Cate Blanchett
and Rooney Mara
discovered astonishing
chemistry during Todd
Haynes's latest trip
to the 1950s

WORDS DAMON WISE





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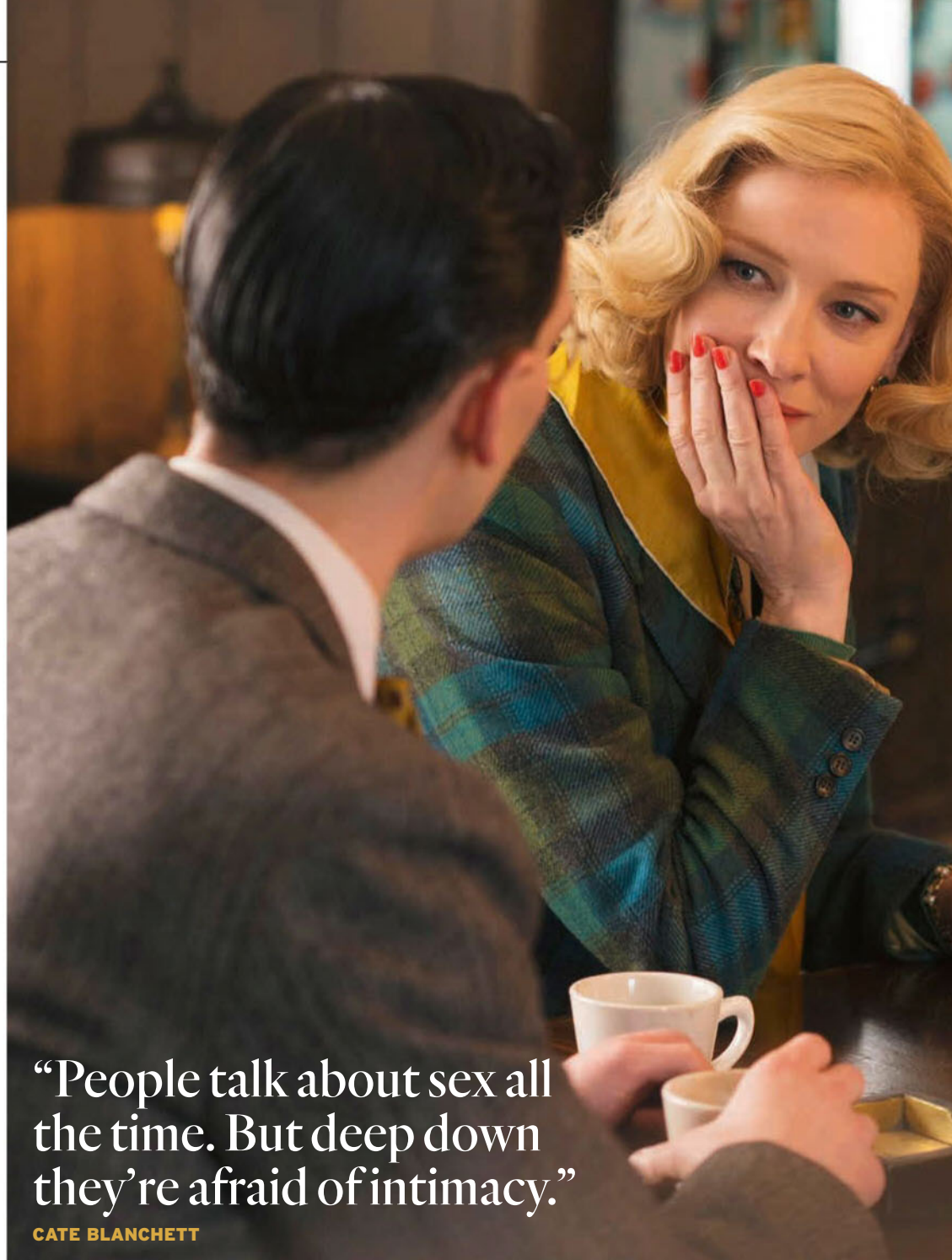
ROONEY MARA REMEMBERS

well the first time she saw Cate Blanchett. She was 13 years old and she'd gone to her local cinema in Bedford, New York, to see Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth*. "When she came on screen," Mara told an audience at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival last year, "I remember the feeling that washed over me, seeing her with her piercingly blue eyes and alabaster skin. Her grace and magnetism took over, even in her silence, even in her stare."

It was the moment Mara knew for sure that she wanted to be an actor. And not just any actor — she wanted to be an actor like *that*. "From that day on, I remember following her and watching her," Mara continued. "Being seduced over and over with each performance."

In her latest film, Mara experienced this a little more literally. Based on the semi-autobiographical 1952 novel *The Price Of Salt* (written by crime writer Patricia Highsmith under a pseudonym, so as not to threaten the mainstream success she'd enjoyed with her Hitchcock-endorsed debut, *Strangers On A Train*), Todd Haynes's exquisite drama tells the story of shop girl Therese (Mara), who falls for someone older, out of her league. It sounds like a classic story of the era but, daringly for its time, the object of Therese's affection is a socialite named Carol (Blanchett), which became the book's title when the author reprinted it under her own name in the more enlightened '90s.

Empire meets Mara, Blanchett and Haynes at the Cannes Film Festival, the afternoon after *Carol*'s premiere. The atmosphere, says Haynes, is "unnatural and overdetermined — it's like launching something from a wedding cake", but for all his modesty, it's clear this film is special, having been received rapturously for its script, score, cinematography and wardrobe. But most of all, for its two leads, who replicate their onscreen yin-and-yang in real life: Mara in a simple



"People talk about sex all the time. But deep down they're afraid of intimacy."

CATE BLANCHETT

black outfit, her hair in a bun; Blanchett a little more formal in a tailored dress, her blonde locks in a loose side parting.

They swear it's a coincidence. "I feel chemistry isn't something you can really predict," says the softly spoken Mara. "It's just a freak thing that happens. You can't create it, it's either there or it's not."

FROM HIS 1988 DEBUT, *Superstar*, to HBO's 2011 miniseries *Mildred Pierce*, Todd Haynes has made a name for himself as a sensitive director of female stories. But he'd never read Highsmith's book before being approached by the film's producers, with a script adapted by Emmy-nominated writer Phyllis Nagy.

"I was woefully ignorant of *The*

Price Of Salt," he admits. "But I was so moved by it. I think it's so interesting in relation to her other novels. I mean, this is the most personal and autobiographical of her novels. But at the same time she's creating a portrait of falling in love that parallels the furtive, over-anxious paranoia of the criminal mind with the mind of the lover."

Playing the older, wiser woman, Blanchett quickly picked up on these undertones. "Patricia Highsmith was a crime writer, sure," she says. "But she also wrote about the human heart. And this time the crime is the love that exists between these women. Although none of us had any interest in making a museum piece about the sexual mores of the 1950s, there had to be doors, there had



• PREVIOUS PAGE: CAMERA PRESS/CHRIS FLOYD

to be windows, to let the audience in.”

Familiar with Haynes from playing '60s Bob Dylan in his dazzlingly surreal 2007 biopic *I'm Not There*, Blanchett was expecting *Carol* to look like his lurid, late-'50s-set melodrama *Far From Heaven* (2002), in which Julianne Moore comes to terms with her closeted gay husband (Dennis Quaid). “I thought it would be a sort of Douglas Sirk extravaganza. And then he started to show us his research material. Films, photographs, the playlist that he gave Rooney and I... it was really exciting. And I thought, ‘This is so far outside what I thought it could be.’”

Says Mara, “A lot of the research was done for us. Phyllis wrote a great

script, and I also had the book, which is an incredible thing to have. There's so much in there, because the book is told from Therese's point of view. And Todd had sent about four or five CDs of songs to listen to, he gave me all these movies to watch, and a book of images, things that had inspired him and would help explain what the film would look and feel like.”

Together, the two women fleshed out their parts with research of their own. “I read a lot of outsider erotic fiction,” says Blanchett, “and we did a huge timeline, Todd, Rooney and I, of what was going on politically, from the end of the Second World War until the '60s, so we'd know what world these women existed within.”

Tea and sympathy: Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara break boundaries.

FOR ALL ITS ARTISTIC merit, however, *Carol* came to Cannes with a frisson of prurience. *Brokeback Mountain* is a good reference point: like Ang Lee's movie, a love scene is not only crucial to the plot, it's what everyone, whether consciously or not, is braced for. Says Haynes, “It's a narrative component. It's not gratuitous, it's not titillating for no reason. In this film it's the thing you are anticipating most — wondering how it will ever happen and what will bring us to that point. So it's essential. But *still* everybody was nervous about it. Then you shoot it and it's over before you know it. Like getting a vaccine jab.”

Blanchett welcomed that challenge. “I suppose where I relate to Todd is that...” She pauses. “Well, of course, I have boundaries, moral boundaries, but I don't find *labels* particularly useful. So I don't draw social or gender lines in the sand about things.”

Mara waves away any suggestion that the film is confrontational. “It's not scandalous to me,” she says. “I understand that it will be to some, and I understand that I live in a bubble that's not normal. I'm so surrounded by progressive, forward-thinking people that, for me, I think, do these issues still even exist? It's like any other love story.”

Blanchett was even less fazed, suggesting at the film's press conference that the sex scene was “hilarious”. “I didn't mean it's hilarious in the end product,” she says “but when you've got to kiss someone's nipples that you don't really know very well...” She laughs. “You've got to have a bit of a sense of humour! I loved working with Rooney. We have the same kind of practicality and gusto. So it was great to do that scene with her.

“But it's still a *scene*,” she emphasises, “and Todd was very clear about how we were going to shoot it. You don't want to feel that it's gratuitous. Like all good physical scenes, you have to feel like you're inside the characters' heads.”

So why is Highsmith's story still making headlines, 53 years down the line? Why is sex, of any kind, still taboo? “People *talk* about sex all the time,” says Blanchett, “but deep down they're afraid of intimacy. It takes time, it takes effort, and you have to give over control, so the idea of being ambushed and giving in to the kind of volcanic love this story describes — whether you're gay, lesbian, transsexual, heterosexual — well, it's a dangerous concept for a lot of people.”

CAROL IS OUT ON JANUARY 14 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 38.

The DIRECTORS

A trio of helmers who've earned the hype

GEORGE MILLER

He took Hollywood to school with *Mad Max: Fury Road*

→ **NOW THE DUST HAS SETTLED ON** *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the enormity of George Miller's achievement is easier to comprehend. At the age of 70, a director whose last film was *Happy Feet Two* rediscovered his inner badass, returning to the franchise that made his name with the energy of someone half his age. Shot over 120 days in the heat of the Namibian desert, with dozens of jaw-dropping stunts in-camera, this is a movie whose production was as crazed as its characters.

"I should probably own up to being insane," laughs Miller, looking anything but in a black leather jacket and jumper. "Plenty of people keep telling me that I am. Particularly my family."

Madness may course through *Fury Road*, but it was composed meticulously. Having spent a decade storyboarding it, Miller and his wife Margaret Sixel, also his editor, then devised a system where the action would be constantly placed in the centre of the frame, making it easier to follow. "With a movie like this, which is getting towards 3000 shots, you have to be assiduous about eye scan, otherwise it just becomes visual noise," explains Miller, who tweaked virtually every shot in post. Some he slowed down. Others he sped up. "I think there might have been two

insert shots somewhere that in some way weren't manipulated," he says.

Fury Road is "not the kind of movie that is usually noticed by the Academy," Miller avers, but the reactions of his peers suggest otherwise. Edgar Wright was one of the early cheerleaders. Guillermo del Toro is a huge fan. Rian Johnson tweeted, "George Miller just took us all to school." "I've never had that kind of response before," says Miller. "To have some of the world's great filmmakers genuinely enthusing about the film has been, I must confess, very gratifying. Though, to be honest, I'm just relieved we got through the movie!" **CHRIS HEWITT**

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD IS OUT NOW ON BLU-RAY, DVD, TO STREAM AND TO DOWNLOAD.



DAVID O. RUSSELL

Darlings of the Academy Russell and J-Law return with third outing *Joy*

→ **"YOU GOTTA BE** relentless." David O. Russell is nearly done with new movie *Joy* and his voice carries a marathon runner's mixture of exhaustion and elation. "It's not a sprint, making a movie!"

His third film with Jennifer Lawrence, following her Oscar-nominated turn in *American Hustle* and winning performance in *Silver Linings Playbook*, is their most ambitious collaboration yet. More than a marathon. "It's like climbing a mountain," says the 57-year-old writer/director. "Jennifer plays a woman across three to four decades, so there are moments that were challenging. It's an intense combination of vulnerability, emotion, passion and ambition."

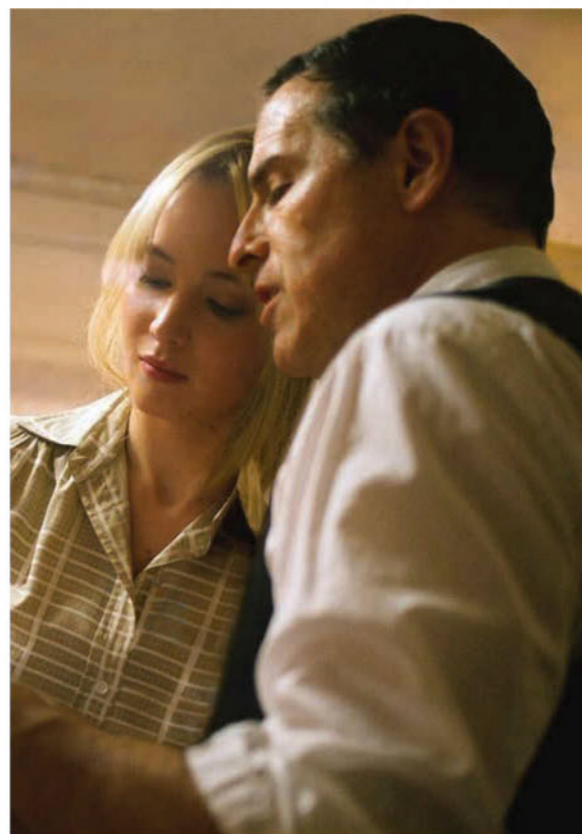
Originally the film was a biopic of Miracle Mop inventor Joy Mangano, a working mum who made a fortune, but now Russell regards it as only "based partly on truth", with the story evolving into a broader tale, inspired as much by other women in Russell's life, including his mother. "It's also about the emotion

joy," he says. "You can't have joy without grit and sacrifice. In the case of this character, it helps in childhood and in facing the world if you manage to keep that alive."

Other Russell alumni Robert De Niro and Bradley Cooper also return, but familiarity hasn't bred complacency. "I think you have to have a healthy fear of your actors," says Russell with a laugh. "Which is a form of respect! You want to be careful and you want to cherish the relationship." Having also directed Christian Bale to an Oscar in *The Fighter*, and been nominated for Best Director three times, Russell could be said to have evolved from indie maverick to Academy darling, but he takes nothing for granted. "You can't make the mistake of thinking it's any different than it was the first time. It's always hard. Nothing changes that. Never be fooled by any attention you've gotten!"

NEV PIERCE

JOY IS OUT NOW AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 34.



TOM MCCARTHY

From Adam Sandler flop *The Cobbler* to Awards front-runner *Spotlight*

→ **REDEMPTION CAME FAST** for Tom McCarthy. The writer/director had an unblemished record prior to this year's *The Cobbler*, an Adam Sandler-starring fairytale that went straight to home formats here. It was disappointing for the director of *The Station Agent* and *The Visitor*, also an Oscar-nominee for his writing on Pixar's *Up*. But mere months later comes his greatest triumph yet: *Spotlight*, the incredible story of how *The Boston Globe* exposed the Catholic Church's cover-up of paedophile priests.

It almost didn't happen. "I don't think Hollywood was rushing to tell [this story]," McCarthy says. "The risk of movies like this is so great." McCarthy himself balked when first offered the project, though that was because he was busy elsewhere. It was only when he and co-writer Josh Singer met the reporters responsible that he became hooked. "I had an ensemble vision. I thought, 'Let's approach it in a way that honoured the reporters' work: straightforward, hard-hitting and unsensationalised.'"

It helped that McCarthy, an actor himself, could take the script straight to friends who happened to be big names. He emailed Mark Ruffalo, offering the role of passionate investigator Mike Rezendes, and received an enthusiastic, 'Yes!' overnight. More character-actors followed: Liev Schreiber, John Slattery, Stanley Tucci. Michael Keaton had emailed McCarthy some kind words after *The Visitor*, and received the role of *Spotlight* team boss Walter 'Robby' Robinson. "Everyone was the real deal," McCarthy says of his cast.

With acclaim from the Venice and Toronto festivals, this thoughtful and balanced exposé drama could follow in the footsteps of *All The President's Men*. "You want your film to connect, but this is also about a few important things," McCarthy insists. "About journalism, and a particular kind of abuse. I'm excited for people to see it."

HELEN O'HARA

SPOTLIGHT IS OUT JANUARY 28 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 35.



THE DANISH GIRL



Under The SKIN



Empire meets *The Danish Girl* — both of them, in fact: **Alicia Vikander** and **Eddie Redmayne**, the pair at the heart of a film that's attracting as much controversy as it is awards buzz

WORDS HELEN O'HARA



L

LAST FEBRUARY, EDDIE

Redmayne flew to Los Angeles for the weekend. Turns out he had an Academy Award to pick up, for playing Stephen Hawking in *The Theory Of Everything*. But he couldn't hang around, or even fully absorb the experience. He was two weeks into shooting a film. "The Oscars happened on the Sunday, and I came straight from Heathrow to do a scene where I was lying naked being X-rayed," laughs Redmayne. "It was with a cracking hangover, so I couldn't really process the whole thing. I was just focused on trying to tell the story."

The story which so distracted the Oscar-winner from his freshly minted statuette, and may yet put him in line for another, was that of two extraordinary women: Lili Elbe (Redmayne) and Gerda Wegener (Alicia Vikander), subjects of Tom Hooper's *The Danish Girl*. Lili was christened Einar Wegener and spent her early life living as a man, a celebrated landscape painter, before becoming the first person ever to undergo gender confirmation surgery in 1930. This was a

time when the term 'transgender' didn't even exist; the film shows Lili being dismissed as a schizophrenic or the victim of hormonal imbalance before she finds help. Gerda, meanwhile, was Lili's artist wife, who in a way went through her own transformation when her husband began the transition to living as a woman.

REDMAYNE AND Vikander shared a research-intensive approach to their roles. Both read David Ebershoff's book, *The Danish Girl*, and Lili's originally published diaries, *Man Into Woman*. "It was amazing to see how expressive and forward Lili and Gerda were," says Vikander. "Gerda seemed like an extremely liberal woman." She and Redmayne examined their characters' paintings, with Redmayne making use of his degree in art history to help recreate Lili-as-Einar's paintings and Vikander loudly protesting her inability to draw before doing just that as Gerda. More importantly, they met with transgender women and men and their partners.

Love in a cold climate: Gerda Wegener (Alicia Vikander) stands by her partner Lili Elbe (Eddie Redmayne).

"Even though this story is set in a time when there were no references for what those women go through together, we knew that we had to find people from that background," explains Vikander. "We both met a lot of people from the trans community, and of course I had conversations with people whose partners had gone through what Lili did. They all wanted to point out that people forget that they went through a transition along with the person they loved. That was really the essence of Gerda's story."

The strangeness of Gerda's situation was that, even as she supported her partner through a process that no-one else seemed to understand, she entered a period of artistic success — with Lili as her muse. "Gerda had this idea of Lili that comes through her art," says Vikander. "She saw something in Lili before she could vocalise it herself."

Hooper says that what made the story so exciting to him was the way Gerda's art "makes the emergence of Lili possible, to some extent. It was probably how they could afford Lili's operation.



“The film is an expression of unconditional love and where it can lead.”

TOM HOOPER



Top: Director Tom Hooper chats to Alicia Vikander between takes.

Above: Eddie Redmayne has his make-up touched up on set.

To me Gerda is a bit of a feminist icon. She's saying, 'I have a right to be a professional artist, to be driven and ambitious.'"

To bring Lili to life, Redmayne worked with movement choreographer Alex Reynolds, who had assisted his performance as Hawking in *The Theory Of Everything*. As he did during that shoot, Redmayne had to keep careful track of his character's transformation — though it was, he insists, achieved in "a very different way", performance-wise. He requested to see all the rushes. "It was about making sure there was a clear line. I met many trans women and they would describe a period of pushing too far when first transitioning. Some described it as hyper-femininisation. So you couldn't make a mistake. I worked with Alex and we tried to map that out."

Providing another parallel with *Theory*, *The Danish Girl* is also the story of an exceptional marriage put under great pressure. "They're extraordinary women," says Redmayne of both Gerda and *Theory*'s Jane Hawking (Felicity

Jones). Though he denies that the similarities between the two films reveal anything about his own preoccupations. "I got cast in *The Danish Girl* whilst doing *Les Mis* [also directed by Hooper], which was the first part I'd ever been straight-up offered. For *The Theory Of Everything* I was at the bottom of the list and I was just trying to get a job. Maybe in a few years, if I'm lucky enough to choose some parts, then we can go back and psychoanalyse my marriage issues."

Hooper had thought about Redmayne for the role when he first read the script in 2008. "We'd worked together on a mini-series, *Elizabeth The First*, when Eddie was a kid, really. I remember thinking then that I'd like to do a film with him as the absolute lead."

Vikander came into the frame later, after Hooper was given an early look at *Ex Machina*, in which she plays seductive AI Ava. "That was real edge-of-my-seat cinemagoing," says Hooper. "I chose Alicia because she has such a big heart. The centre of this story is this journey that's made possible not just because Lili

herself is so radical in embarking on it at this time, but also her wife is so radical in supporting her. The film is an expression of unconditional love and where it leads when one partner wants to change."

"I had heard about this film for a long time, it's been around trying to get made for 12 years," says Vikander. "When they announced that Eddie and Tom were going to do it, I thought, 'I'm really looking forward to seeing that.' Then my agents called and said there was a second very good female role."

From the first time Redmayne and Vikander read together, it was clear that Hooper was onto something special. "I'll never forget, she came into the audition and I was behind the camera reading," says Redmayne. "I got to the end of the scene and I was waiting for Tom to go, 'Cut.' I looked and he was in tears. Alicia is just formidable. She really raised my game and challenged me."

DESPITE LARGELY positive reactions, *The Danish Girl* itself has been challenged, drawing criticism for casting a cisgender actor as Lili, and for ignoring claims that Gerda was a lesbian. "We commissioned the best primary research we could, and there's certainly some evidence of that but it's not conclusive," says Hooper. "I know Eddie couldn't have been more sincere and conscientious in his desire to get it right. Is access of trans actors to parts as easy as that of cisgender actors? I don't think it is. I think the industry has to create more opportunities for trans actors, not just to trans roles but to cisgender roles."

Last year, a *Time* magazine cover asked if we had reached "the transgender tipping point" as TV shows like *Orange Is The New Black* and *Transparent* shone a light on the appalling prejudice that trans people face. "When I started, this was perceived to be a film that would be very hard to get made," says Hooper. "I find it amusing that people now see it as quite an obvious film to have done! It's a wonderful sign that the Western world has moved on."

"I think all of us who were on it thought it was a very important story to tell," says Vikander, "so to be part of shedding light on this story was something that was in my heart."

"The whole process has been the most formidable education," adds Redmayne. "This is a love story and it's beyond gender."

THE DANISH GIRL IS OUT ON JANUARY 21 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 41.

BRYAN CRANSTON

On tackling *Trumbo*, his biggest role since *Breaking Bad*

→ THERE IS A WONDERFULLY tragicomic scene in Bryan Cranston's new film which sees him, as blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, sitting opposite Alan Tudyk, playing his friend Ian McLellan Hunter, as the pair regard an Oscar on the table between them. It's been awarded to Hunter for writing *Roman Holiday*, but he wants Trumbo to take it because it was Trumbo who *really* wrote that script, though as a communist he's barred from working in Hollywood. But Trumbo resists. "He actually threw it in a bottom drawer," says Cranston. "Until you can have your own name on your own work, it's worthless."

That was the tragedy of the anti-communist campaign of the late '40s and '50s, which saw hundreds of artists rendered *personae non gratae*. Trumbo was one of the more flamboyant figures targeted who, like a less murderous Walter White, resorted to desperate measures to see his family through.

It didn't take much to convince the *Breaking Bad* star to play him. "I saw videotape of this character, and boy!" he exclaims. "With the cigarette holder, all the pontification, he's this wacky, idiosyncratic raconteur. He was bombastic and self-abusive; he was constantly poking and jabbing. He irritated people."

Thanks, Cranston says, to Jay Roach's "insightful" direction and conversations with Trumbo's daughters, he gives a complex, often hilarious performance as this contradictory figure, whose moment of glory came with *Spartacus*. Reaction so far suggests Cranston could soon be sitting down again to stare at a statuette, this one with the correct name on it. "Oh, who knows?" he demurs, refusing to be drawn. Even so, it's not hard to imagine that award-refusal scene being replayed, with brilliant irony, in the Dolby Theatre come Oscar night. **HELEN O'HARA**

TRUMBO IS OUT FEBRUARY 18 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

The ACTORS

Supporting or lead, there's gold in them thar performances



• BRYAN CRANSTON: ANDREAS LASZLO KONRATH / TRUNKARCHIVE.COM / SNAPPER MEDIA

TOM HIDDLESTON

Showing a whole new side in
I Saw The Light

→ **DIRECTOR MARC ABRAHAM** first laid eyes on Tom Hiddleston back in 2011, at the premiere for *War Horse*. "That guy looks like Hank Williams," he whispered to his wife. "Can we go to *one movie*," she replied, "without you talking about Hank Williams?" Nearly four years later, the fruit of Abraham's obsession with the womanising, hard-drinking hillbilly bard of country music is finally complete. And at its core is a remarkable performance by, yes, Tom Hiddleston, an unlikely ringer for the late star.

"I knew it was a challenge," says the actor, "but it was the best kind. I'm always excited by foreign territory. And Hank was a firework. He was a wild man. He was uncontrollable. So he fell victim to all the temptations of fame."

To prepare for the part, Hiddleston went to live with the film's musical director, Rodney Crowell, for five weeks in his Tennessee home. "Within a day Rodney said, 'I got this gig comin' up. I figure you might wanna see what it's like.' I just thought I was going to be a fly on

the wall, but just before we went out there he said, 'How 'bout we get you on stage?'"

The 'gig' turned out to be the Wheatland Music Festival, where Hiddleston sang Williams's song *Move It On Over* for a crowd of 10,000. "It was honestly the most extraordinary feeling. I don't think I particularly sounded like Hank then, but the thrill of playing that song for that many people was amazing." It turned out to be easier than playing the man. "In all the research I did, it felt like there was an unknowable quality at the centre of him," says Hiddleston.

The result seems likely to keep the actor on his toes during awards season, which he must juggle with "chasing King Kong" as he shoots *Kong: Skull Island*. Abraham, of course, is delighted. "When I chose him, every one of my friends was like, 'Who's Tom Hiddleston?'" he laughs. "The big joke now is they all go, 'Hey, how'd ya get Tom Hiddleston?'"

DAMON WISE

I SAW THE LIGHT IS OUT THIS YEAR.



MARK RYLANCE

The theatre legend who dominates
Spielberg's *Bridge Of Spies*

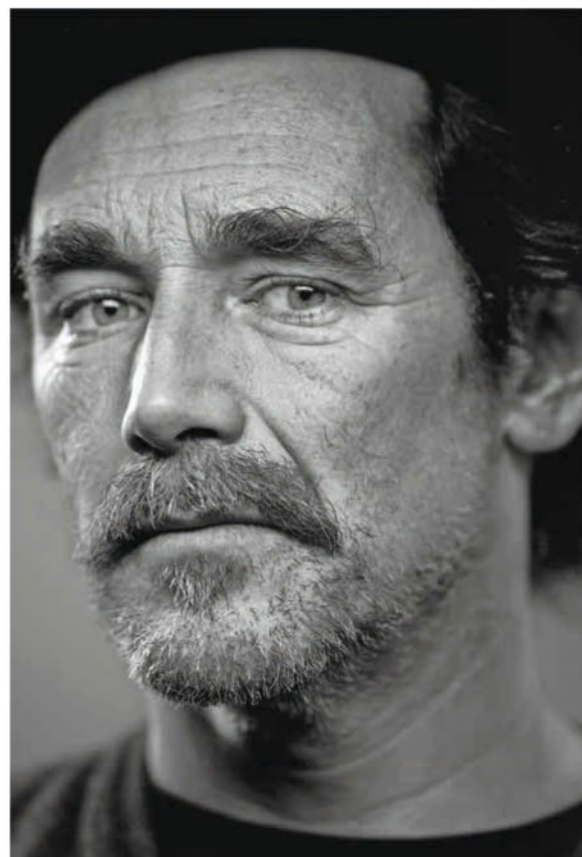
→ **"I WAS VERY NERVOUS," SAYS** Mark Rylance about working with *Bridge Of Spies* director Steven Spielberg. "Just look at what he's done. It would be like joining Arsenal or Man United as a young player who's only played in League One." Yet, as Rudolf Abel, the Russian put on trial for spying, Rylance gives a subtle, exquisitely detailed turn with a killer monologue that puts him at the heart of any Best Supporting Actor conversation.

Bridge Of Spies is not the actor's first encounter with Spielberg, having turned down a small role in 1987's *Empire Of The Sun*. "I think my agent gradually gave up on me after that." A titan of theatre (three Tonys, two Oliviers), and more recently acclaimed for his astonishing performance as Thomas Cromwell in the BBC's *Wolf Hall*, Rylance has proved a reluctant film actor. "Partly because I turned away from it again and again," he says, "partly because I was too expressive. I got better as an actor." After getting down to the last three for the lead in the Coen

brothers' *A Serious Man*, he made a concerted effort to consider more movie work. Though his next role was in Jason Statham bomb *Blitz*, in 2011. "It was a shitty idea," admits Rylance. "It was shit to make and I thought, 'What am I doing? I wanted to work with the Coen brothers.'"

Bridge Of Spies means he finally did get to work with the Coens, in a sense — they have a writing credit for giving Matt Charman's script a polish — and he's reuniting with Spielberg to play the title character in next year's Roald Dahl adaptation *The BFG*. "It's like watching Picasso with his paintbrush," he says of Spielberg directing child actor Ruby Barnhill. But it's not like he's now thrown himself into movie-work. "If someone wants me, I'll consider it. But I'm not going to be reading scripts or putting myself up for stuff. That's how things have panned out for me and I'm happy about it." **IAN FREER**

**BRIDGE OF SPIES IS OUT ON BLU-RAY AND DVD
MARCH 2.**



STEVE JOBS



JOB*s*



Tech origin story. Family drama. Study of a genius. Monster movie. Call Aaron Sorkin and Danny Boyle's awards-tipped film what you will, just don't use the B-word

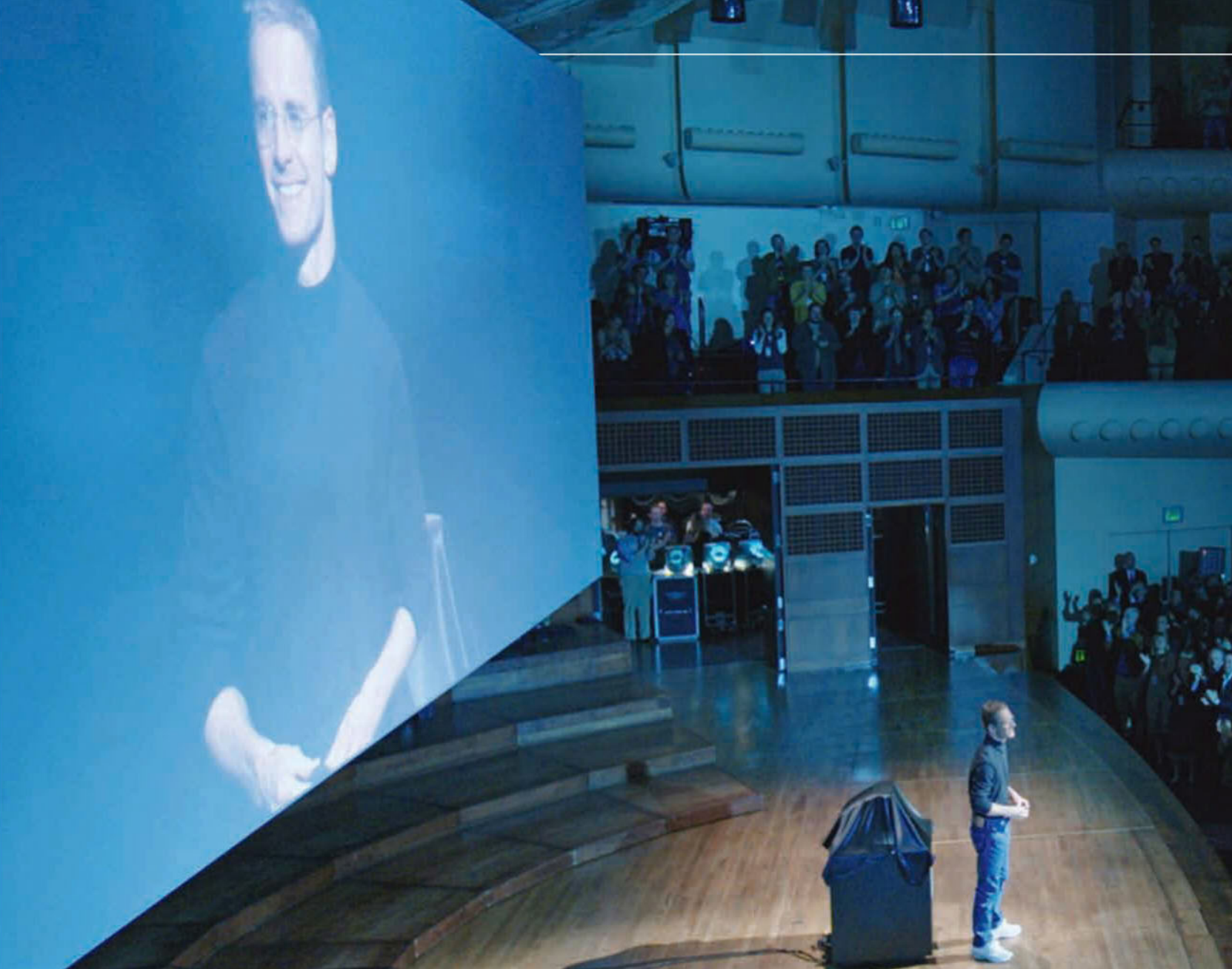
WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

THIS IS NOT A BIOPIC," stresses Danny Boyle, director of Steve Jobs. "That's one of the misconceptions about this movie."

Expect no eureka moments of a young Steve messing about with circuit boards; no jubilant unveiling of that half-munched Apple logo; no bedside vigils in the last weeks of his life. "I didn't know what I wanted to do," recalls writer Aaron Sorkin. "I just knew I didn't want to do that. The cradle-to-grave

structure is tired and over-familiar."

With apologies to Sorkin, Jobs's was a life less ordinary. Viz., cradle: born 1955, adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs. Founded Apple in 1976. Forced out in 1985. Funded Pixar. Returned to Apple in 1997. Fired people. Turned it into a \$300 billion company. Reconciled with daughter. Grave: died of complications relating to pancreatic cancer on October 5, 2011. Grieved by millions. No, a polite biopic wouldn't cut it. Sorkin's task was to reinvent the click wheel entirely. >



I SPENT A COUPLE OF MONTHS just pacing around and banging my head against the wall,” says Sorkin on those early structure-grappling days. Jobs had died before powerhouse producer Scott Rudin’s initial approach with the idea, but Sorkin organised meetings with those in the former Apple CEO’s inner circle. Like Walter Isaacson, whose 2011 Jobs biography lent him much raw material, they poured out their memories of the man, good, bad and occasionally monstrous, until inspiration struck. “I found these points of friction that Steve had with the people in his life,” remembers Sorkin, “and I thought, ‘What if all those were dramatised backstage before three different product launches?’ I didn’t think in a million years that the studio would allow me to do it...”

To his surprise, both Rudin and Sony Pictures, the project’s home at the time, loved the idea. What the man behind *The Social Network* and *The West Wing* had proposed was something more theatrical than cinematic. Heavy on exposition, with

events unfolding in dressing rooms and antechambers, Sorkin placed Jobs in a setting more familiar to Broadway than Burbank. “I’m a playwright that kind of pretends to be a screenwriter and tries to get away with it,” he says.

Sorkin zeroed in on a 14-year period when the white heat of Jobs’s drive and ambition burned with an extra imperative: survival. Opening in 1984 with the launch of the Mac, Jobs is soon exiled by Apple CEO John Sculley. Act two offers the closest thing to the biopic staple, the comeback, with the launch of Jobs’s \$6,500 NeXT computer. Finally, there’s the triumphant return to the company he’d created with Steve ‘Woz’ Wozniak, and the introduction of the iMac to a by-now expectant world.

For Sorkin there was drama to burn in the tight-wire tension of those pre-presentation clashes with Wozniak, his marketing chief Joanna Hoffman, and anyone else who happened to be in the area. Jobs the businessman, formidable of conviction and temper, came quickly on

Seth Rogen as Jobs’s business partner and fellow tech genius, Steve Wozniak.





Steve Jobs (Michael Fassbender) launches the iMac. Life will never be the same.



Danny Boyle consults his star. Possibly on the art of origami.

the page. Much harder was getting under the skin of Jobs the father, a key subplot Sorkin wanted to weave into his three acts. Jobs's infamous 'reality distortion field', a knack for bending his worldview to his interests, saw his daughter, Lisa Brennan-Jobs, exiled from his affections for years. To Sorkin, it seemed an unforgivable betrayal. "I didn't know how I'd be able to care that he'd done all these fantastic things when he did the most important thing he was supposed to do poorly," he recalls.

A meeting with Brennan-Jobs, now 37, helped address those concerns. She offered up stories even Isaacson had been denied. "That was the most influential part of the research," Sorkin stresses. Many of those memories, including tales of the lengths her father had gone to deny his paternity of her, cast Jobs in a deeply unflattering light. "But Lisa told them in such a kind way and at the end of the story she'd say, 'But you can tell he really loved me because...'" So I decided to write a movie that rewards patience."

PATIENCE WAS A KEY theme of the project. There was an early flirtation with David Fincher, Sorkin's collaborator on *The Social Network*, who then clocked off in a heated flurry of leaked emails with Rudin and studio head Amy Pascal. Then came a switch of studios from Sony to Universal, when the former put the film in turnaround. By this time, the script had arrived in Danny Boyle's inbox. The British director offered a key ingredient. "Steve Jobs required a director who has fantastic visual gifts, as Danny does, to make this play into a movie," Sorkin stresses.

For Boyle, it was a straightforward decision, even if he found himself peppered with questions about his supposed predecessor on the project. "A lot of people said, 'Were you honoured to be stepping into [*Fincher's*] shoes?' I was! I don't know what went on with them or why they fell out," he recalls, "but I was very happy to be involved."

Far from shaking off the inevitable >



comparisons, Boyle embraced *The Social Network*. “Everyone told me *not* to watch it,” he remembers, “and to watch *The West Wing* instead. But it’s an extraordinary film, very honest to its subject matter and yet exhilarating to watch. A lot of it is *sitting down*. When did that last happen in a film? So that was liberating because ours is about movement. I said to myself, ‘I see, this is a standing up movie.’ And it literally is. It helped me feel confident about it. This is another film that goes behind the data, but it’s different.”

For the man whose Olympics opening ceremony spanned the industrial and information ages in a flurry of towering chimneys, SMS-athons and Kenneth Branagh in a big hat, the material held obvious appeal. “It’s the modern world, isn’t it?” enthuses Boyle. “We shot in Jobs’s real garage and called it ‘Bethlehem,’ because it was the cradle of the information age. These companies — Apple, Google, Facebook, Uber — are bewitching us and shaping our world more than any other forces, even more

“The man who made such perfect products was himself poorly made.”

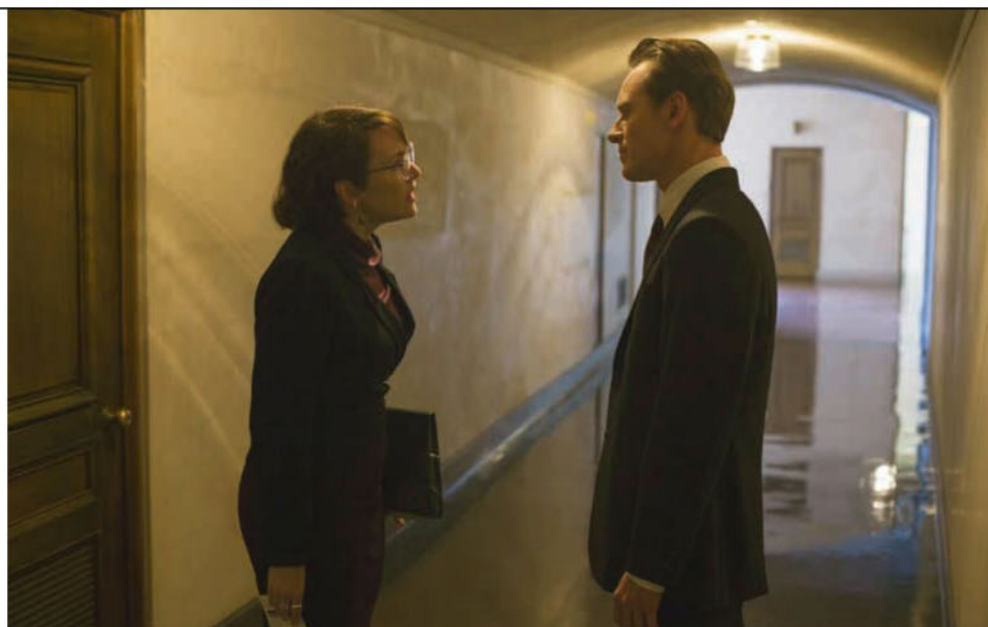
DANNY BOYLE

than politicians. But what are the costs of that?”

To some degree, he sees *Steve Jobs* as a cautionary tale. “There’s a huge element of that. In many ways, the man who made such perfect products is himself poorly made.” If Boyle had had his way, the film’s title would have reflected the glitches in Jobs’s own coding directly. “I asked Rudin and Sorkin if we could call it *King Of France*,” he chuckles. “People used to call Jobs that behind his back because he behaved like [*Louis XIV*].”

GRANTED THE KEYS TO the kingdom, Boyle needed a king. Christian Bale and Leonardo DiCaprio had both been linked with the role, but the director had his sights set elsewhere. “Fincher had lined up Bale, but when the dust settled, I wanted Michael [*Fassbender*].” Boyle had in mind Fassbender’s small but memorable turn in *Inglourious Basterds*, keen to give a hint of humour to a man known for his waspish intensity. “He won’t thank me for saying this, but there’s a bit of Cary Grant in Michael, so that’s how I sold him to the studio. I said, ‘Listen, you’re going to get all that extraordinary power that you’ve seen in *Hunger* — not that the studio heads had seen *Hunger*, but they had seen *12 Years A Slave* and *X-Men* — and you’re going to get that touch of the Cary Grants Tarantino teased out of him.”

Those negotiations, so common in the Hollywood pre-production process, soon spilled into the public domain. On November 24, 2014, hackers, reputedly from North Korea, “firebombed” Sony



Pictures in a cyber heist that saw private studio emails tipped wholesale onto the web. One leaked memo, sent to then-Sony boss Amy Pascal, saw Sorkin questioning Boyle's choice of lead. "I don't know who Michael Fassbender is and the rest of the world isn't going to care," sniffed the writer. "This is insane." It was a throwaway sentiment he'd come to rue. "The last thing you want is the actor playing Steve Jobs to not be confident in the rehearsal room, so I obviously had to have a talk with Michael," he tells *Empire*. "I told him that at the time I wrote that email I hadn't seen nearly enough of his work. Now I can't imagine anyone else playing the part."

This Jobs was never designed to be a direct facsimile of the man himself. If he had been, Ashton Kutcher might have been offered another crack at the role. Unlike Kutcher — a virtual doppelgänger who essayed him in 2013's *Jobs* — Fassbender, as he readily admits, looks "nothing" like him. "That's certainly true in the first act," says the actor, "but by the

end of the film, we'd come to something that was as close as it was going to be, and hopefully it'll just have happened for the audience by the third act." The resemblance needed to be gestural rather than slavish, stresses Boyle. "I've done this before in *127 Hours* because [James] Franco looked nothing like Aron Ralston, but what's weird is that in some weird osmosis way, they do end up looking like the character in the end."

In the Fassbender toolkit was Jobs's trademark garb of Levi's 501s, Issey Miyake turtleneck and New Balance sneakers. "They're nice, comfy runners," laughs Fassbender of those much-derided Jobs pumps (they were even the butt of a Ryan Gosling joke in *Crazy Stupid Love*). "He had this mythical uniform, but maybe it was just about removing one decision in the morning, because he had millions of more important decisions to make." Key, though, was the script. "It's the best modern script I've read," says Fassbender. "There's a rhythm to the way Sorkin writes, it's like music."

Left: Boyle talks script with legendary screenwriter Aaron Sorkin.

Above: Kate Winslet as Jobs's protective colleague, Joanna Hoffman.

Above: Jobs reflects.

The dialogue-heavy, three-part screenplay did place a heavy burden on the actor and he had less than two months to master it before rehearsals started in January. Instead of Christmas turkey and carols, there were long hours immersed in Sorkin's words, and walks listening to old Jobs interviews. "I'd play them on a loop just to hear the man's voice, then I'd mull over certain personality traits," explains Fassbender. "Ultimately, it's that classic thing of, 'Just learn the lines, darling.' You have all this information and it seems overwhelming but then you start getting into it and picking away at it. There were so many lines to learn and I'm a slow learner of lines, so it frustrates me. Friends of mine are like, 'Oh, I'll look at it a couple of times and it's in there.' Seth Rogen [*Steve Wozniak in the film*] is one of those. Unfortunately, I don't have that gift."

Of course, Fassbender's other gifts are pronounced. Already tipped for his first lead actor Oscar nod, his Jobs is by turns scary, charming and messianic. "He's very well cast as Magneto," reflects Boyle, "because he's magnetic, my God. And he needs to be in this, and more — and thank God he is." This Steve Jobs is a force of nature who defies you to look away.

"I was just nervous that I'd keep up my end of the bargain," says a very relaxed-sounding Fassbender. "He's such an important person in our time, so it's a big deal." Whether he liked or disliked the man was moot. "'Like' is a funny one. Identifying with him was important and being as non-judgmental as possible," he explains. "You just try to have a human being up there on the screen, with all the complexities involved. Especially with someone like this, who changed how the world works on an epic scale."

His character's unique hardwiring — the angry Buddhist who revolutionised our lives — provided all the deep complexities actors yearn for but rarely find in a script. "With any brilliant person, there are going to be huge contradictions, because they're passionate about what they're doing," he points out. "They have to be that way." Sorkin takes up the point. "Whether they're a hero or Jack Nicholson in *A Good Good Men*, I have to write my characters as if they are making their case to God why they should be allowed into heaven."

So does heaven now boast its own Genius Bar? "I do believe Steve is in heaven now," adds the writer with a laugh, "and he is very dissatisfied with the way it's run."

STEVE JOBS IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 4 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 42.



EMPIRE
presents

The 1 Good Ol' Boy

WORDS

Nick de Semlyen

PORTRAITS

Steve Schofield

**EMPIRE HEADS TO THE FLORIDA ESTATE OF BURT REYNOLDS
TO SPEND AN ALL-ACCESS WEEKEND WITH THE BANDIT
HIMSELF, ONCE THE BIGGEST MOVIE STAR ON THE PLANET**

TYPE

Jordan Metcalf



HIS REFRESHMENTS ARE LAID

out. A cluster of grapes, a glass of ice water and a bowl of Veggie Straws potato chips ('Zesty Ranch' flavour), arranged lovingly on a side-table.

The students are assembled. This Friday night, 18 of them have come. They include a retired Las Vegas cop, a local real-estate agent, and an actress who once played a nurse in an episode of *Miami Vice*. All here for the same reason: to learn from the man they sometimes call "the master", sometimes "Mr. R".

And finally, he enters. He was once the biggest movie star in the world, partying with the Rat Pack, romancing scores of Hollywood starlets, trashing a freeway's worth of automobiles. Now 79 years old, he may appear frail, moving with the aid of a walking stick and wearing red-tinted spectacles, but that magnificent moustache still commands attention. The room erupts in applause as he walks to his special seat. Then a hush takes over, pupils awaiting his opening address. "Holy cow," says Burt Reynolds, stretching out his legs. "I've been working all day and I am wiped."

These are the hallowed halls of the Burt Reynolds Institute For Film & Theatre. The name suggests a vast hippodrome, perhaps with a racetrack around the back for practising car-flips. The truth is slightly less grand. Attendees drive to the town hall in Lake Park, Florida, and head to the second floor, passing the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Commission Chambers and other municipal bureaux to slow the pulse. There, inside the Mirror Ballroom, where a mirrorball dangles from beams of Dade County Pine, they have their acting evaluated by a living legend.

It's not easy to get in. To be invited into the \$40-a-session masterclass, you must prove yourself in 'Fundamentals', a course focusing on character development and body language. This takes at least a

year to do; some never make it through. A man in his twenties writes every month from Australia, imploring the Institute for a spot. *Empire's* visit, meanwhile, marks the first time a media outlet has been invited to sit in. Rather than be thrust onto the stage to tackle some Chekhov, we're ushered to a front-row chair beside Mr. R. From there, we watch for 90 minutes as nervous thespians strut their stuff for the *Smokey And The Bandit* star.

Any and Beverly adopt Cockney accents to perform a scene from Philip Ridley's play *Vincent River*. Midway through, one of them stumbles on a line, later attributing it to her new dental braces. "Y'know, it's alright to add in a line about your braces," advises Reynolds. "I do it all the time, and get accused of it. If they want to take it out, they can. Truth is what we want."

Tracy, who is auditioning to join the inner circle, joins veteran Rhonda to take

on a scene from Neil Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady*. "That was real nice, kids," Reynolds tells them. "Real nice. Last time one of you was ahead of the other. Today you were together. It makes such a difference." There's a dramatic pause, before the master delivers his verdict. "Tracy... welcome to class."

Reynolds has spent the day in a sound booth, recording the audiobook of his new memoir *But Enough About Me*, and he wasn't joking about being wiped. But now and again he drops an anecdote that reminds you of where he's been. After another duo have channelled Taylor and Burton for a piece from *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*, he nonchalantly declares, "I remember when Elizabeth was at my house."

That hush descends on the room once more. "She was in the bathtub," Reynolds continues, "and I suddenly heard this scream. I said, 'What's the matter?' She

Burt Reynolds, photographed exclusively for *Empire* at the Burt Reynolds Institute for Film & Theatre, Florida, on October 2, 2015.





said, 'They're going to give me a million dollars for *Cleopatra*!' At the time, nobody got a million dollars, especially a woman. I was so proud of her." He lets loose one of his famous chuckles. "I said, 'That's great. But if you're getting all that money, I get to jump in the tub with you...'"

IT WAS IN THIS VERY

room, back in 1955, that Reynolds began his ascent. A stocky 19-year-old, he'd become a star football player at Palm Beach High School but had recently injured his knee and was limping around in a funk. His English Lit teacher, an ebullient eccentric named Watson B. Duncan III, suggested he audition for the school play. "He tricked me," smiles Reynolds, after wrapping up the class. "I started reading the page he gave me. Four words in, he said, 'You got



**"IF I'D SAID YES TO
STAR WARS, IT WOULD
HAVE MEANT NO
SMOKEY AND THE
BANDIT..."**



the main part."

That part was Tom Prior, in Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*, a sort of proto-*Lost* in which guests on a luxury liner realise they're dead. As the alcoholic Tom, Reynolds stormed the Mirror Ballroom with a *tour de force* performance that bagged him the Florida State Drama Award. "I still remember being up there," he says, gazing at the stage. "I wasn't nervous at all. I'd been dragged to Watson's class, a black sheep sitting at the back like all jocks do, but I slowly started moving forward. He was beyond any teacher I ever had."

Reynolds had the bug, and over the next 15 years flung himself into every challenge that came along. There were guest-spots on *The Twilight Zone* and *Flipper*, stints on *Gunsmoke* and *Hawk*, and movies like *Armored Command* and *Navajo Joe*. Between jobs, he worked as a truck driver, bouncer and dockworker.

Top: Reynolds and *Empire*'s Nick de Semlyen assess the students' best efforts.

Above: The Hollywood legend offers some sage advice.

Most character-building of all, he shared a New York apartment with Rip Torn.

"He was wild," Reynolds says of the notoriously volatile *Men In Black* star. "One time they asked me to go duck-hunting in the Roosevelt Game Reserve for [TV show] *The American Sportsman*, and I took Rip with me. While we were walking around, some geese flew above us, squawking. Rip goes, 'You know what they're saying? They're saying, "That's the crazy Rip Torn down there."' He took his gun, said, 'I'll teach that sonuvabitch to talk like that,' and shot one. I said, 'Rip, you really *are* crazy.' But I couldn't help but love him. Still do."

Reynolds built a reputation as a fearless man of action, stoked by his eagerness to do his own stunts. "The first one involved me going through a plate-glass window on a show called *Frontiers Of Faith*," he says. "I got 125 bucks — a nice chunk of change in 1957." On NBC series *Riverboat*, he'd ask the writers to add dangerous gags to the scripts. He felt more confident leaping off a building than saying his lines.

Then, in 1971, along came the perfect film. John Boorman had tried to cast Marlon Brando and Jack Nicholson in *Deliverance*, the tale of four city boys on an ill-fated canoeing trip, but retreated when they asked for \$500,000 each. He could, however, afford Jon Voight and the more or less unknown Reynolds, who even looked strikingly like a young Brando. Together with Ned Beatty and Ronny Cox, the pair headed to the Chattooga River in Georgia — 80 kilometres of white-water hell — for what would be a gruelling shoot, beset by wipeouts, injuries and near-drownings.

"*Deliverance* took 14 weeks to make, longer than most films," Reynolds says, "but it created a great bond between us. It was a skeleton crew, and I got to learn so much about what goes into directing. John Boorman is still the best I've ever worked for."

He still winces when recalling the day he cracked his coccyx on a rock. "The tailbone thing was real bad," he says. "They'd tried throwing a dummy over the waterfall. I looked at the rushes and said, 'It looks ridiculous. I can do better than that.' So I went over myself and got mangled in the hydroflow. When I got out of hospital, I asked John, 'How did it look?' He said, 'Like a dummy going over a waterfall.'"

Oozing with backwoods menace, *Deliverance* was a huge box-office hit, the one Reynolds had been waiting for. Suddenly, he was on the A-list. And he'd only climb higher. >

A SHORT DRIVE UP

US 1 from the Institute is Burt Reynolds's mansion. *Empire* visits the next afternoon, and it's exactly what we'd hoped it would be. Beyond a set of forbidding gates, down an impossibly long driveway with signs like "NO TRESPASSING" and "RABBITS & SQUIRRELS HAVE RIGHT OF WAY", you find the five-bedroom house, named Valhalla after the Norse hall of the gods where fallen warriors meet their makers. Reynolds has lived here since 1980. In fact, he's stayed in these parts most of his life; a nearby park is even named after him.

The waterfront estate's 1.4 hectares include a helipad and a yacht dock. Inside, it's even better. Reynolds auctioned off thousands of pieces of memorabilia last Christmas (see right), but his home remains stuffed with Burtifacts. A model railway track snakes around the ground floor. There's a private cinema, stocked with 35mm prints of his preferred films (including *My Favorite Year*, all 12 reels of *The Ten Commandments* plus, awesomely, *Moonraker* and *The Beastmaster*). In the rec room, meanwhile, a stuffed Kodiak bear guards the wet bar. "That's Jack," Reynolds explains. "I worked with him a few times. I once got jammed up between him and a tiger that got loose, on a set in Florida in the '60s. Once Jack passed away, his trainer mounted him and a few years later didn't have any place to keep him anymore, so that's when I got him."

Today is a rest day; the star is dressed down, in a sports jacket and elephant-skin boots. Again he seems exhausted, speaking slowly and sometimes in a low mumble, but he's happy to reflect on his unbelievable life. There are plenty of visual cues on the walls, like the group photo, taken at one of his birthday parties, featuring him surrounded by Frank Sinatra, Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Dean Martin, Joan Collins, Sammy Davis Jr., Sid Caesar and Lucille Ball. Or the neon sign — "Burt's Place" — from his attempt to launch a nightclub in Atlanta, complete with stained-glass dancefloor featuring a rendering of his face.

Reynolds made it big in a canoe, but it was behind the wheel that he went stratospheric. "I'm the Picasso of car pictures," he said in 1994. If so, his Blue Period spans from 1973 (*White Lightning*) to 1982 (*Cannonball Run II*). Often collaborating with stuntman-turned-director pal Hal Needham, those nine years saw him pursued by the Highway Patrol across endless asphalt, performing ever-more-outrageous stunts. 1977's *Smokey And The Bandit*, which paired him with an adorable Sally Field, was the

A life in pictures
(top to bottom):
Deliverance (1972);
*Smokey And The
Bandit* (1977);
*The Cannonball
Run* (1981); *Boogie
Nights* (1997).



pinnacle of his gum-chewing, beer-sipping, wisecracking persona: only *Star Wars* topped it at the US box office that year.

"When *Smokey* was released I was at my ranch with Sally," he says. "We took a drive and saw this crowd outside the Palm Beach Mall. I thought there must have been an accident, so we pulled into the parking lot to see what was going on. And there was no accident. They were all waiting to get into the theatre to see *Smokey*. I actually got a little nervous."

All his dreams, it seems, were coming true. For *The Cannonball Run* he was paid \$1 million per week, prompting him to say, "It was immoral to offer anyone that kind of money. It would have been even more immoral to turn it down." He was invited to the White House ("President Reagan asked me to pray with him") and Buckingham Palace ("A manservant came out and said, 'The Queen Mother would like to see you.' I said, 'Oh my God, what did I do wrong?'"). He bought a racehorse and a petting zoo. Between marriages he dated Farrah Fawcett, Catherine Deneuve and Field. He worked with Mel Brooks and Woody Allen, made a musical ("He dances like a drunk killing cockroaches," sneered one critic), even released an album.

But not everything was peachy. For one thing, his father, 'Big Burt', a chief of police, seemed unimpressed. "There was always tension there," reflects Reynolds, "because he wasn't able to express himself. I think he was proud of me, but he never said so. It was hard for me." For another,



BANDIT'S LOOT

LAST CHRISTMAS, BURT AUCTIONED OFF MANY OF HIS PERSONAL EFFECTS. WE ASKED HIM TO EXPLAIN SOME OF THE MORE INTRIGUING ITEMS



1 "FORGET THE DOG, BEWARE OF BURT" WARNING SIGN (ABOVE)

SOLD FOR: \$1,280

No explanation needed. "It was a gift from somebody. I did have a dog at the time, but not anymore. I loved that dog."

2 SIGNED FRIENDS CAST PHOTO

SOLD FOR: \$2,560

Could this item be any more random? It turns out there's a connection between Burt Reynolds and the biggest sitcom of all time: cinematographer Nick McLean, who began his career working with Reynolds and also shot *Friends*.

3 SMOKEY AND THE BANDIT GO-KART

SOLD FOR: \$13,750

"The go-kart was custom-built for [my son] Quinton." Perhaps not as nifty as a 1977 Pontiac Trans Am, but still a handy vehicle for when you need to elude a pesky law-enforcement officer — so long as they're also in a go-kart.

4 DELIVERANCE CANOE

SOLD FOR: \$17,920

"This is one of several used in the actual movie. I repaired it by putting a few ribs across where it had broken in half." Not included in the asking price: terrifying child with banjo.

5 JOHN FORD'S DESK

SOLD FOR: \$28,000

This 19th century mahogany monster once belonged to one of Hollywood's most lauded purveyors of the Western. "He's the best. The greatest director there's ever been. I don't know how many times I've seen *The Searchers*."

6 ALLIGATOR-SKIN COWBOY BOOTS

SOLD FOR: \$3,250

Monogrammed with their owner's initials, this is one of many pairs of flashy boots sold off. "I loved them all, though they were hard to get off. I was wearing those early in my career. [Former love] Dinah Shore was a big influence on the way I dressed. She made me a lot smarter."

there was his break-up with Field, whom he still considers the love of his life. "I was so busy back then that I really didn't take the time for myself or others in my life... I really should have taken more time to be with Sally. I regret that to this day."

Other regrets: turning down Jack Nicholson's role in *Terms Of Endearment* and 007 in *Live And Let Die*. "I met with [Cubby] Broccoli in Miami and told him, 'An American can never play James Bond,'" he says. "Another brilliant career move. He must have listened to me, because there hasn't been one. Turning down *Terms Of Endearment* was my biggest mistake, because Jim Brooks wrote the part for me. But I'd promised Hal I'd make *Stroker Ace*. I also regret not doing *Zardoz* [which would star Sean Connery]. I got sick and wound up having to tell John Boorman I couldn't do it. It broke his heart and I've always felt bad about it."

The biggest role Reynolds claims he rejected was Han Solo. But this one doesn't bother him so much. "I thought it was a decent picture, but I didn't love it," he says. "And if I'd said yes, there would have been no *Smokey And The Bandit*: they were filmed at the same time." In retrospect, they make a great double bill: who is the Bandit but Solo with a less furry co-pilot and Coors in the hold? Curiously, a 1971 episode of Reynolds's cop series *Dan August* features Harrison Ford in a tiny role. Hunt it down: it's your only chance to see the man who would be Han Solo share the screen with the man who coulda been.

CALAMITY STRUCK

in 1984. Reynolds was finally making a movie with old friend Clint Eastwood: Prohibition comedy *City Heat*. But during the filming of a bar-fight scene, somebody accidentally walloped him over the head with a heavy metal chair. He got up in agony, but carried on filming. "I didn't want to let down Clint," he remembers, "so I played it down. If I only knew that that was the best it was going to be for a long while, I'd have handled it differently."

What became clear over the coming months, as he popped painkillers to get through each day, was that there was something seriously wrong with his jaw. Beset by blinding headaches and dizziness, he starting consuming up to 50 Halcion pills a day, at one point suffering a nine-hour hallucination during which he was convinced he was breakfasting with comedian Milton Berle. "That was probably the toughest time of my life," he says. "I started losing weight and the rumour started going around that I had AIDS. I lost a lot of people that I thought

were friends. But on a positive note I learned that the ones who stuck by me — Johnny Carson, Liz Taylor, Hal, a few others — were my true friends."

Eventually he overcame both injury and addiction, but a comeback has proved more elusive. He has worked steadily and eclectically, from the reboots of *The Dukes Of Hazzard* and his classic *The Longest Yard*, to *Universal Soldier III: Unfinished Business* and *Bean*. But the closest he's come to taking the world by storm again was 1997's *Boogie Nights*. As Jack Horner, the porn Mephistopheles who gives Mark Wahlberg's Dirk Diggler his big break, he put a dark spin on his old macho roles, earning a Golden Globe and an Oscar nomination.

Still, he's not a fan. "I felt it glorified pornography," he explains. "I made a lot of friends on set, but I wasn't impressed by the Method acting going on. Mark walked around wearing a fake erection. And Heather Graham stayed in character the whole time, with half her clothes off..."

Not a complaint you expect to hear from the sex symbol who famously posed buck-naked on a bearskin rug for *Cosmopolitan* in 1972. Though he admits he wishes he'd never done it, the image lives on via internet memes and a recent promo pic for *Deadpool*, with Ryan Reynolds (no relation) recreating the pose. And this is far from his only legacy.

Edgar Wright has studied the Reynolds-directed *Sharky's Machine* as prep for his forthcoming car movie *Baby Driver*. Tarantino used musical cues from *White Lightning* in both *Kill Bill* and *Inglourious Basterds*. A picture of Reynolds popped up in *Bridesmaids*. And after playing the Almighty in an episode of *The X-Files*, he recently voiced a devastatingly sexy version of himself on animated series *Archer*, causing a female character to sigh, "I swear to God, you could drown a toddler in my panties right now."

All are tributes to the indomitable Mr. R: the man who has seen and done it all, who has survived bad reviews, ill health and irked ex-wives, who still insists on doing his own stunts.

Time comes for *Empire* to depart the master's mansion. We shake Reynolds's hand and leave him, surrounded by memorabilia, ursine keepsakes and a large painting of himself in his prime, stripped to the waist and rippling with muscles. It's our last glimpse of Valhalla, the place where warriors can rest at last.

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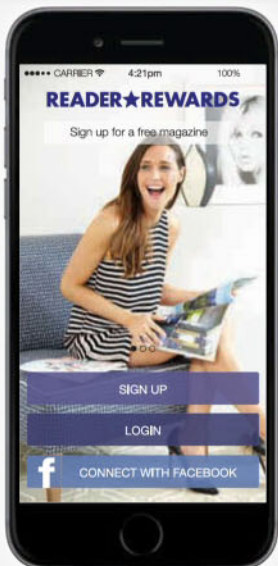
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JANUARY 11 — FEBRUARY 7, 2016

EDITED by DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

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The highest-earning music biopic off all time adds more beats to mix.

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True Detective heads West; manifest destiny doesn't completely ensue.

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Prophetic, ironic, tragic... Folks, give it up for *Grizzly Man*!

MASTERPIECE

FORD'S FIESTA

Raiders Of The Lost Ark validated Harrison Ford as the hero of the age, but it's Steven Spielberg's take on George Lucas's idea that made it pure popcorn

p110

Win!

On Blu-ray: *Bone Tomahawk*, *Holding The Man* and *Sicario*!
On DVD: *Irrational Man*, *Sinister 2*, *Straight Outta Compton*, comedy smash *Catastrophe* & more!

p112

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Straight Outta Compton — Director's Cut

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 14 / RATED MA15+ /

DIRECTOR F. GARY GRAY /

CAST O'SHEA JACKSON JR., COREY HAWKINS,
JASON MITCHELL, NEIL BROWN JR., ALDIS
HODGE, PAUL GIAMATTI

DVD BR UV 

L. A. STORY



BEING FORMULAIC isn't always a bad thing. *Straight Outta Compton* doesn't so much tear up the music-biopic sheet as hug it close... before scrawling its

own "street knowledge" in the margins.

In a sense, F. Gary Gray's soup-to-nuts N.W.A. story is a virtual remake of Oliver Stone's *The Doors*. The era's changed and it's a very different musical genre, but both are epic accounts of ultimately tragic groups who rose up through the fissure of American political division, challenged the prevailing cultural agenda, embraced controversy over their lyrics, and apparently had a

moment when one of them noodled on a keyboard for a while before triumphantly coming up with an awesomely catchy riff.

And as if two-and-a-half hours weren't enough for Gray, who worked with producers Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, he's now put out this Director's Cut, which clocks in at 163 minutes. In interviews following the theatrical release, Gray had promised that the new version would better address the band's suspect treatment of women (both lyrically and personally), but all we have are a few additional scenes displaying tenderness between Dre and Eazy-E and their respective other halves. Otherwise, it is, frankly, all filler no killer.

It's fair to say the cameraman's joke hadn't gone down too well.

MAY THE BEST CUBE WIN

WORDS
JAMES JENNINGS

ICE CUBE'S SON, O'SHEA JACKSON JR., ON FIGHTING OTHER ACTORS TO PLAY HIS DAD

Were you up against other actors to play your dad?

Yeah, there were definitely a list of actors ahead of me. My father's job as a producer is to make sure the film is as perfect as it can be and he can't sabotage it in any way for personal gain, so there were actors ready to take the spot if I couldn't act, if I fell flat in my auditions. There was a chemistry test where I had to outperform three other Cubes. You can throw in the intimidation factor when you introduce yourself as O'Shea Jackson Jr. to somebody who's trying to play Ice Cube. [Laughs]

That's a great way to mess with the competition: "I know more about the character than you, pal".

I walked into the building and I saw a jheri curl, so I walked up to the guy and said "Hey are you going for Eazy-E?", and he turned around and says "No, I'm going for Cube." In the back of my head I was like "Oh man, he's gonna love this", and I say "How you doin', I'm O'Shea Jackson Jr. and I'm going for Cube too, so, ah, good luck." [Laughs]

Your dad was on set every day. Did he coach you through scenes?

I would ask him things that were going through his mind. There were some incidents where he's thinking, "Everybody else is having a good time", but he would tell me "I'm thinking about the contracts, I'm thinking about the fact that I'm still living at my mom's house." Those are things that you can use.

Were there other great stories involving your dad that didn't make the film?

Yeah, there was the instance where they couldn't get into their own album release party. They tried to get in and security's like "Nah, y'all look like some gangbangers, I'm not gonna let you in", and they're like "You hear the music? You hear what's going on? It's us!" They gotta eat at a restaurant across the street while there's a club bumping their album release party that they can't get into.

What was your favourite scene to shoot?

The scene where Cube smashes up the record company office. That scene almost didn't happen and I had to fight to get it in the film. Could you imagine the film without that? Without that scene, everybody sees Cube almost get angry, but nobody's seen him at his boiling point, and dammit, the baby that I'm talking about [in that scene] is me! It's a personal scene, and it needed to be in there.

Not that it fundamentally damages a film which, deservedly, made \$200 million against a \$28 million budget, opened bigger than *Mission: Impossible — Rogue Nation*, and now stands proud as the most successful music biopic ever made. There were worries that Dre and Cube's close proximity would render it a vanity project — the former was, as the disc's making-of reveals, on set every day; the latter's own son was cast... as him! But, while it does skew massively positive, with an end-credits montage which leaves us in no doubt as to how hugely successful Cube and Dre have been, their involvement gives it a powerful sense of autobiographical authenticity. It's

something that's bolstered by astonishing performances from its mostly unknown cast (yes, including Cube's son, O'Shea Jackson Jr.), and the rooting of the shoot in real South Central locations. As the on-screen gang are told early on by one hilariously clueless naysayer, "Nobody wants to hear this reality rap shit." Well, it's the reality as much as the rap that makes this rise above the formula.

EXTRAS Commentary, featurettes, more.

DAN JOLIN



ALSO OUT

**Kajaki: Kilo Two Bravo**

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 20 / RATED R18+ DVD BR ▶

Cumbersomely named but expertly made, *Kajaki: Kilo Two Bravo* is a blistering war pic, though not about fighting to win as much as fighting to survive. Trapped in a minefield near the titular dam, a group of British soldiers seek escape knowing every step could be their last. Stripped down and simple – no score, no whiz-bang photography – this feels like a throwback to matinee classics like *Ice Cold In Alex* or *The Lost Patrol*, but the intensity and fear of the – true – situation is something else. David Elliot stands out in a very human ensemble. Will make you flinch. Could make you cry.

EXTRAS Three featurettes.

TRAVIS SHERIDAN

**Sinister 2**

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 20 / RATED MA15+ DVD ▶

A standard follow-up to the solid horror-mystery. Abused wife Shannyn Sossamon hides out in a church where a massacre took place and her two sons fall under the spell of the demon who was behind the curse from the first film. It features more talking-point 8mm family snuff films, staged as very nasty jokes, and spends more time with the pack of well-spoken, malicious spectral kids who are agents of the boogeyman. However, the story ties itself in knots over its complicated curse and the occasional decent scare doesn't elevate it much from the *Insidious-Paranormal Activity* pack.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, more.

KIM NEWMAN

BONUS FEATURE

KEEPING THE BRITISH END UP**KAJAKI DIRECTOR PAUL KATIS CRANKS UP THE TENSION**

Was it a daunting prospect making a war film for your debut feature?

There were so many advantages attached to this story. It was my first feature so there was a logistical reason for choosing a story set in one location. It was achievable. [Laughs] Many first-time filmmakers choose a single-room drama. And that's what this is. Albeit the room is a big sand pit. We felt we could tell this story without spending a fortune. Also the story could be told only from the troop's POV.

There were also no fire fights...

The reality is action films aren't cheap. If we tried to compete with the Americans in terms of action, we would fail. It's that simple. So far better to replace action with suspense.



You never show the bad guys...

Not having an enemy portrayed comes with some advantages as well. People can debate whether you should avoid politics or not but for me, I was interested in the soldiers' experience, not debating if we should be in Afghanistan. By not having the enemy, it meant I didn't have to portray them as the other, which is what a lot of war films do, effectively an alien race that you are allowed to kill and shoot without feeling for them. The flip-side of that is showing them as human but then the moral case of whether we should be there or not has to be raised.

By not having them at all, you just get around the problem. Then you add in the irony that the mines were left by the previous combatants, 25 or 40 years ago, the Russians, and I think there is an elegance to that. It makes the soldiers experience slightly more existential and makes the enemy war itself rather than a particular enemy.

It also heightens the tension, the audience's focus is never broken...

Absolutely. If I had cut away I would have relieved you of the tension. The soldiers didn't experience that so why should you! **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN**

The Duke Of Burgundy

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 13 / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR

PETER STRICKLAND / CAST SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN, MONICA SWINN, CHIARA D'ANNA

DVD ▶

MADAMS BUTTERFLY

WEIRD, WOOLY AND beautifully shot, Peter Strickland's tale of two female lovers living in a fairytale forest is as powerful a trip as his post-production chiller *Berberian Sound Studio*. Aficionados of vintage Euro sleaze will appreciate the nods to Jesús Franco and the cameo from '70s star Monica Swinn. But even if you don't know arthouse from an outhouse, you're still likely to be sucked into the film's peculiar, hypnotic, butterfly-heavy world. Strickland's as droll as he is cerebral — on the disc's extras he claims that one bit was inspired by a dream he had after watching *Planes, Trains And*



Automobiles — and mischievous jokes include mannequin extras and a credit for the project's perfume, a gag he stole from Audrey Hepburn movie *Paris When It Sizzles*.

EXTRAS Strickland has put some work in, providing a commentary, an old Super 8 film, and 45 minutes of deleted scenes, with text intros for each. He's self-critical, at one point admonishing himself for a visual metaphor that's "very sixth form", and revelations include that he lacked the budget to hire a dominatrix, blew one scene by getting distracted by a candy-floss machine, and wrote another as payback for an "advertising chump" who told him off for eating pumpkin seeds too loudly.

NICK DE SEMLYEN

Wow, it really is kinky!



Batkid Begins

★★★★★

FROM NOW / RATED G / DIRECTOR DANA NACHMAN / CAST MILES SCOTT, ERIC JOHNSTON, HANS ZIMMER

DVD

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A BAT



A DOCO THAT'S essentially *Warm Fuzzies: The Movie*, this covers an astounding 2013 Make-A-Wish event that went from small-scale to mega-sized.

To wit: five-year-old Batman superfan Miles Scott, a leukaemia sufferer, wants to be Batman for a day and defeat some Bat-foes. Social media gets wind of it and the next thing you know, San Francisco is flooded with tens of thousands of people who want in on the fun and Miles is getting well wishes from the likes of President Obama and every Batman actor from West to Affleck. Holy insta-fame!

At times you'll wonder if it's all for the grown-ups enjoyment rather than the kid at the centre of the media storm — and, despite its good nature, the event feels a little slight for a feature — but there's uplift and tears to be had for the non-stony hearted.

EXTRAS None. **JAMES JENNINGS**

Batman and mini-me Batkid set out to foil the Bat-baddies.

Sicario

★★★★★

2015 / FROM JANUARY 27 / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR DENIS VILLENEUVE / CAST EMILY BLUNT, BENICIO DEL TORO, JOSH BROLIN

DVD BR UV

DENIS THE MENACE



LAST YEAR'S BEST thriller is memorable for its shocking opening and climax — both feature the dead; the first, corpses stored in the walls of a Mexican drug cartel safe house; the second, unforgivable assassinations — but what defines Denis Villeneuve's hollow-eyed examination of the DEA's pursuit of the ultra-violent Sonora Cartel is its patience and sense of inexorability. With Jóhann Jóhannsson's thrumming, blaring score and long, floating shots of the changing landscape (Roger Deakins's lens work is superb) we are transported from the USA to Juarez, Mexico, from civilisation into Hades, from naivete — as personified by Emily Blunt's true-hearted DEA agent Kate



Macer — to pragmatic corruption (Josh Brolin's Matt Graver). Or the lengths Kate — and we — are kept in the dark about the nature of the mission, why she is even required, or the identity of enigmatic team member Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro).

A daring, poignant and electrifying thriller from a man who is making them a habit (*Incendies*, *Prisoners*), *Sicario* strides towards its heart of darkness to a high-C note of shredding tension, dragging us with it, queasy and complicit. Villeneuve's *Blade Runner* sequel will be something to see. In the meantime, this will pin you and your moral contradictions to your seat.

EXTRAS Featurettes.

DANIEL MURPHY

Benicio Del Toro plays backseat driver to Josh Brolin in *Sicario*. Jon Bernthal isn't too happy.



Dark Places

★★★★★

FROM NOW / RATED MA15+

DVD BR

Big things were expected of this dark and twisted chiller, set amidst the plains of the American Midwest. The story hails from journo turned bestselling author Gillian Flynn, better known for penning *Gone Girl*. This too features a spirited turn from a major star (Charlize Theron) and boasts a fine supporting cast (Nicholas Hoult, Christina Hendricks, Chloë Grace Moretz) to boot, although it struggles to find a similar level of tension as David Fincher's box-office hit. Still, there are plot twists here and there that defy expectation, and Theron is all-too believable as the jaded survivor forced to face her demons.

EXTRAS None. **ED GIBBS**



[REC] 4: Apocalypse

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 20 / RATED MA15

DVD BR

The wildly successful zombie horror series from Spain comes to a suitably gory and grizzly end, with intrepid TV reporter Angela Vidal (Manuela Velasco) back to battle undead nastiness (and a group of sexist men) out at sea. An inevitable outbreak soon threatens to devour them all in an ocean-set romp that's effective, if formulaic. The flesh-eating seafarer is certainly better than its sub-par predecessor — which oddly abandoned the tone and spirit of the first two *[REC]* found-footage outings, with little success — and will certainly do as an engaging, if not apocalyptic, send-off to a memorable franchise.

EXTRAS Making-of. **EG**



Holding The Man

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 14 / RATED MA15+ /
DIRECTOR NEIL ARMFIELD / CAST RYAN CORR,
CRAIG STOTT, SARAH SNOOK, GUY PEARCE,
GEOFFREY RUSH, ANTHONY LAPAGLIA

DVD BR 

BOYS KEEP SWINGING



ADAPTED BY WRITER/
stage director Tommy
Murphy from the memoir
by Timothy Conigrave, Neil
Armfield's *Holding The*
Man takes a potentially

maudlin premise — a tender romance
tragically eroded by discrimination and
terminal illness — and transforms it into
sharp and deeply affecting dramatic
cinema. Aspiring actor Tim (Ryan Corr)
and star footballer John (Craig Stott)
meet cute at a Melbourne high school in
the late-'70s, but the purity of their

relationship is challenged by the ugly
reality of prejudice and HIV-related
illness as they transition into adult life.
Armfield succeeds in balancing empathy
with social critique, while both Corr and
Stott are solid leads — no easy task,
given they have to convince across 15
years and wildly disparate haircuts. It's
the gallery of supporting vets, though —
particularly Anthony LaPaglia as John's
bitterly homophobic dad — who give the
film a real serve of emotional ballast.

EXTRAS Featurettes, commentary.

LUKE GOODSSELL

Couch potatoes.

BONUS FEATURE

HERE COMES YOUR MAN

DIRECTOR NEIL ARMFIELD TALKS EYELASHES, 10CC AND WAITING FOR THE RIGHT ACTORS

The soundtrack tells a story in the film...

Music is so important. There was actually a song, in an early cut of the film, by 10cc, in the scene when Tim has got rid of his parents and is having a dinner party and introducing John to his friends. In the background we had the 10cc track *The Film Of My Love*. The lyrics go, "The film of my love will travel the world". We finally didn't use it because it's background music and 10cc are expensive [laughs]. We used Mozart instead because it's out of copyright and allowed us a joke. But in that moment we were hoping that the film will travel the whole world over and spread our message.

And that message was a hot potato in 2015?

It's ironic that the film came out at a time of focus on the national debate about same sex marriage. Tim's up there laughing about it I think. The stars just aligned. Tim and John were living those politics way before they were ever part of a larger agenda.

How important was it to nail the casting?

Incredibly! It was such a daunting task. There's a little photo from 1978 when Tim and John were 18, which we use as the last image after the credits. The picture was like a talisman for me. We have no idea who took it, it's such a beautiful image in the way the two boys relate to each other. That helped

me to understand the feeling between them. We had over 300 screen tests before we found the right actors. Ryan [Corr] I saw very early and said to [writer] Tommy Murphy I think he might be Tim. Tommy was less certain so we went around the world. Ryan kept on testing, he knew he had the part in him. Craig [Stott] sent me this scrappy old test from LA with buses in the background. It started really uncomfortably so I hadn't shortlisted him. To my shame I forgot about him. Then an old friend said 'Have you seen Craig Stott? He has the right eyelashes!' I still wasn't sure until I saw John and Ryan together. And then it was clear they had the chemistry. **DMB**



Bone Tomahawk

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 21 / RATED R18+ / DIRECTOR

S. CRAIG ZAHLER / CAST KURT RUSSELL,
PATRICK WILSON, RICHARD JENKINS

DVD BR 

ENTER A WORLD OF KURT



KURT RUSSELL FANS, January is going to be your month: not only will you get to see the former Disney child star (and his resplendent moustache) in

Quentin Tarantino's gritty, violent Western *The Hateful Eight*, but you'll also get to see the man f.k.a. Snake Plissken in this: gritty, violent Western *Bone Tomahawk*. Only Goldie Hawn should feel luckier.

Without having seen *Eight* in action, we can still confidently make a few favourable comparisons between this and Q.T.'s *modus operandi*: writer (and debut director) S. Craig Zahler has a gift for memorable, erudite dialogue that is a delight to the ears, and his languid



pacing gives his words room to breathe, allowing characters the necessary time to come alive. There's also a cast full of venerable genre notables (Russell, of course, and in bit parts *Back To The Future*'s James 'Strickland' Tolback and, er, *The Lost Boys*' Frog brother Jamison Newlander). Oh: add occasional graphic violence to the mix, too.

Still, this is no Q.T. knock-off: it's a Western with horror elements (the R-rating is deserved), and ultimately acts as a sandpit for top-grade character actors to revel in delicious wordplay.

The plot involves Sheriff Franklin Hunt (Russell), his dotty back-up Deputy Chicory (a stellar Richard Jenkins, who effortlessly steals the film), sharp and sharply dressed womaniser Brooder (Matthew Fox) and injured Arthur O'Dwyer (Patrick Wilson) setting off on a dangerous mission to rescue the latter's wife (Lili Simmons) when she's kidnapped by cannibal, mountain-dwelling troglodytes. Death ensues.

A killer oater with the odd bit of gore, *Bone* is a win for all involved.


EXTRAS None. **JAMES JENNINGS**

Brooder (Matthew Fox), Chicory (Richard Jenkins) and Sheriff Hunt (Kurt Russell) on the lookout for troglodytes.



The Visit

★★★★★

DVD BR UV 

FROM JANUARY 21 / RATED M


Freeing himself from the shackles of the Hollywood studio system, M. Night Shyamalan, after a decade of critical drubbings and diminishing box-office returns, has put his money where his mouth is, stumped up the US\$5million budget, and made a slight return to form with found footage horror *The Visit*. Assisted by great performances from Aussies Olivia DeJonge and Ed Oxenbould, as two kids who spend a week with their bonkers grandparents, and a creepy tone that constantly unsettles and amuses (the oven cleaning gag is a cracker), Shyamalan is having fun again, and it shows on screen.

EXTRAS Making-of, more. **DMB**



Everest

★★★★★

DVD BR UV 

FROM JANUARY 21 / RATED M

The true life story of disaster on the notorious peak, where several members of an expedition lost their lives in 1996, deserves a more emotional telling. Where *Everest*'s visceral, immersive scale impresses, its human drama is less focussed. William Nicholson and Simon Beaufoy's screenplay juggles high altitude tension, base-camp dread and intimate domestic fears; director Baltasar Kormákur just about pulls it all together. The cast is solid, but despite admirable intent in performance and verisimilitude, we should feel more for the human tragedy.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more.

JOHN CATANIA



Two Men In Town

★★★★★

BR DVD 

FROM JANUARY 13 / RATED M


Nominated for a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, Rachid Bouchareb's remake of the 1973 French film of the same name relocates the action to *Breaking Bad* country in this sombre meditation on forgiveness. Forest Whitaker plays a recently released cop killer desperate to escape his criminal past. Brenda Blethyn rocks the American accent as his parole officer, Harvey Keitel hams it up as a cop with a grudge and Luis Guzmán can't help but descend into cliché as his ex-partner in crime. It's all been seen before, but a reliably formidable Whitaker elevates the material.

EXTRAS None. **DMB**



The Diary Of A Teenage Girl

★★★★★

DVD BR UV 

FROM JANUARY 21 / RATED MA15+

A folk soundtrack and cutesy animated flourishes must take up at least a full page in 'Live-Action Indie Filmmaking For Dummies', but somehow director Marielle Heller integrates both staples into the sexual awakening of protagonist Minnie (Bel Powley). The adolescent seduces the boyfriend (Alexander Skarsgård) of her hippy mum (Kristen Wiig) in the least creepy fashion imaginable, then comes-of-sexual-age through encounters with both genders. Tonally assured, *Diary* celebrates the complexities of developing sexuality without judging. Refreshing.

EXTRAS None. **JEREMY CASSAR**



Irrational Man

★★★☆☆

FROM JANUARY 20 / RATED M / DIRECTOR
WOODY ALLEN / CAST JOAQUIN PHOENIX,
EMMA STONE, PARKER POSEY

DVD BR 

FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX



WOODY ALLEN'S

newbie starts with the usual black-and-white title typeface (Windsor Light Condensed, font fans) but not the obligatory jazz ditty or classical movement. Instead it features the sounds of driving, perhaps a hint that for once Allen is jettisoning his hermetically sealed universe for something set in a recognisably real world. Well, he doesn't. *Irrational Man* is firmly set in the Woodyverse — that witty erudite world where young hotties get besotted by “brilliant” older men — and delivers a middling but still

enjoyable entry into the Allen Canon.

Given that Allen's films are so concerned with the life of the mind, it is surprising he has not made more films based in academia. Here the setting is a fictional Rhode Island university, where respected philosophy tutor Abe Lucas (Joaquin Phoenix) is in a funk, pursued by fellow lecturer Rita (Parker Posey) and bright undergrad Jill (Emma Stone), who soon becomes Abe's confidante. The initial set-up is heavy-going, too many overwritten philosophical debates boasting little in the way of wit or spark.

But, as with *Crimes And Misdemeanors*, *Manhattan Murder Mystery* and *Match Point*, Allen shows himself to be adept with thriller mechanics (he should do a *True Detective*). *Irrational Man* is at its most enjoyable when Abe, overhearing a dinner conversation about a distraught mother being ill-served by a biased judge, decides to plan the perfect hit and finds a new lease of life in plotting death. The director has a blast with the minutiae of murder and relishes Abe's attempts to improvise his way out of Jill's growing

suspensions. It goes without saying that the tiniest of details comes back to haunt him. The climax is a kicker.

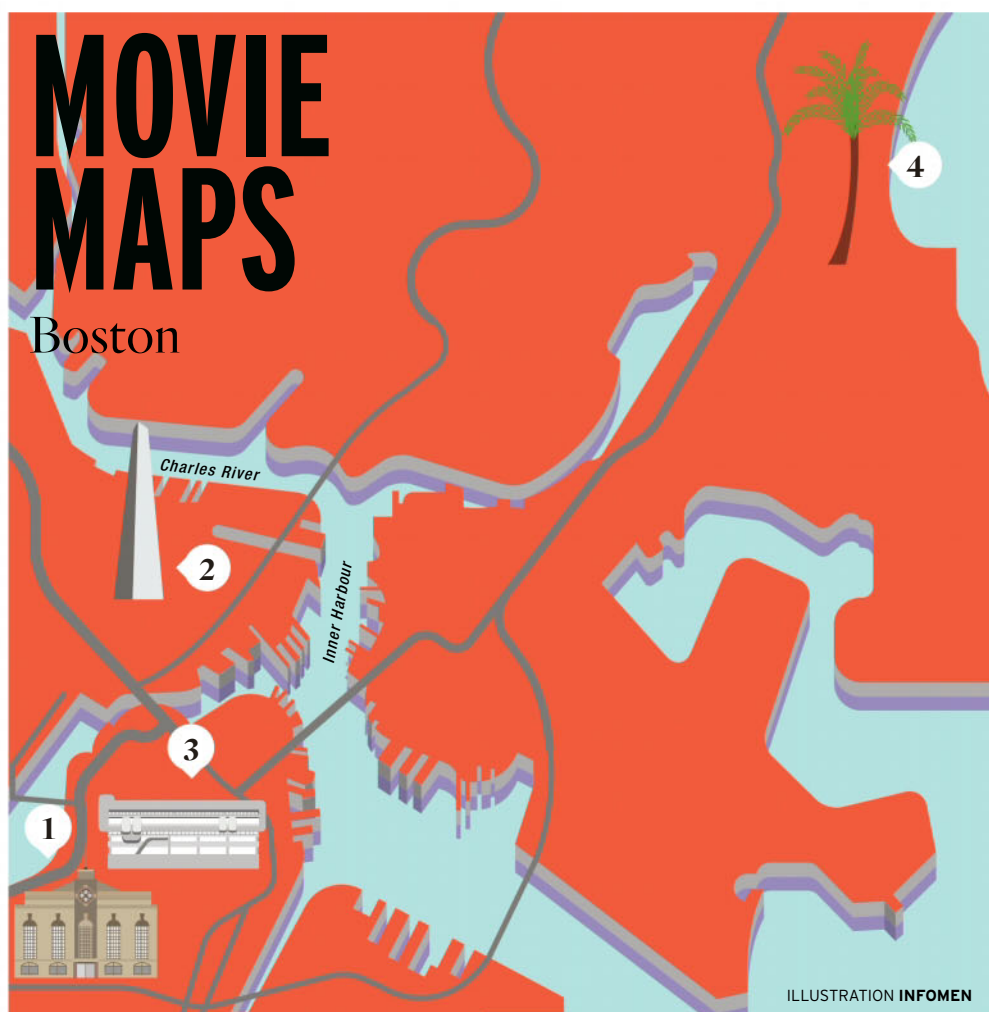
Allen's filmmaking remains consistently attractive — Darius Khondji's images are warm and autumnal — and his repeated use of Ramsey Lewis Trio's *The In Crowd* becomes effectively claustrophobic, but this is Woody cruising at a comfortable altitude without ever really hitting the heights. You could concoct a drinking game for every one of Woody's favourite philosophical questions the film poses — sink a double every time someone mentions the pointlessness of existence! — but he doesn't develop his arguments any further than previous films.

If *Irrational Man* has a point of difference, it's in its lead. Joaquin Phoenix makes for an engaging central figure, ignoring Allen-esque speech patterns and nervous energy, giving Abe some heft. It is in Emma Stone's Jill that you feel the vitality — not to mention conscience — of the filmmaker.

EXTRAS None.

IAN FREER

Lunch was never a happy affair.



WHERE TO FIND ICONIC LOCATIONS FROM TV AND FILM

WORDS HELEN O'HARA



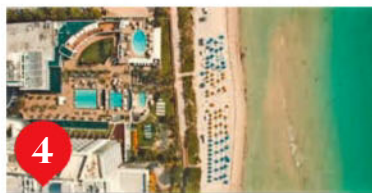
The Boondock Saints (1999) The Liberty Hotel
If you're looking for somewhere luxurious after your tramp around Beantown, head for The Liberty. Ironically given that name, it was originally the Charles Street Jail, which played the high-security prison where Billy Connolly's *Il Duce* was held in this none-more-'90s cult favourite.



The Town (2010) 15 Monument Square, Charlestown
Ben Affleck's armed robber traces Rebecca Hall's bank clerk back home to this handsome brownstone house. She must be a pretty wealthy clerk, because this has a view directly onto the Revolutionary War's Bunker Hill Monument, one of the most recognisable landmarks in Boston.



The Departed (2006) Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center, Hurley Building
If you're a fan of Brutalist architecture and/or Mark Wahlberg swearing, this government building is the one for you. Handily located on the way from the Bunker Hill Monument back to downtown, it played the police HQ exterior in Martin Scorsese's cop remake.



Black Mass (2015) Revere Beach
Just because you're in New England doesn't mean you can't sun yourself. Revere Beach, four miles from downtown Boston, plays Miami in the Johnny Depp-starring gangster film, and while the palm trees and Cuban café signs were brought in for the occasion, the beach itself is pretty without them – just a little colder.

ALSO OUT



The Transporter Refueled

★★★★★

DVD BR Apple

FROM JANUARY 27 / RATED MA15+

There's a sense that unleaded has been put into the diesel tank of this ridiculous action reboot. High on action but low on logic, it sees courier Frank Martin (now played by Ed Skrein) blackmailed by former prostitutes into rescuing his father. Skrein gives it his all, but we miss *The Stath*. [JN](#)



Me And Earl And The Dying Girl

★★★★★

DVD BR Apple

FROM JANUARY 13 / RATED M

The story of a budding filmmaker who befriends a fellow student when she's diagnosed with the Big C, Alfonso Gomez-Rejon's inventive tale avoids mawkishness and the smaller C – cliché. There's much fun in the recreations of classic films, before a climax that is moving and beautiful. [CH](#)



The Wolfpack

★★★★★

DVD Apple

FROM JANUARY 13 / RATED M

This stranger-than-fiction doc from director Crystal Moselle introduces us to the Angulo brothers, raised in isolation in Manhattan. Patriarch Oscar casts a sinister shadow from which the siblings' movie re-enactments provide welcome relief, while Moselle's unobtrusive style captures the clan's journey into the light. [ES](#)

ALSO OUT

**Please Like Me: S3**

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 14 / RATED MA15+ DVD Apple TV

In its third season, *Please Like Me* embraces its destiny as a soap opera about characters who only try to be funny, and it's a better show for it. Once you stop waiting for laughs, the relationship material (which is often strong) shines, while the attractiveness of Josh's lovers is countered by their emotional issues; who knew Josh would end up the stable one? Still, shows about nothing usually have more going on than this; it's possible to capture mid-20s aimlessness too accurately.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more.

AM

**The Family Law**

★★★★★

FROM FEBRUARY 3 / RATED M DVD Apple TV

Over one long Queensland summer, everything changes for 14-year-old Chinese-Australian Benjamin Law (Trystan Go). The broad strokes here are familiar ones; his mother is comically outspoken, Law loves drama a little too much (the twist being he really is gay), and his parents' relationship is increasingly wobbly. But thanks to its origins in Law's best-selling memoir, there's a lot of wit and warmth to be found between those strokes. It's a funny family drama rather than classic comedy, feel-good viewing in the best way.

EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes, more. AM**True Detective: S2**

★★★★★

FROM NOW / RATED MA15+ / CREATOR NIC PIZZOLATTO / CAST VINCE VAUGHN, COLIN FARRELL, RACHEL MCADAMS, TAYLOR KITSCH

DVD BR Apple TV

BAD COPS, BAD COPS**THE CRIME TD2**

commits was unavoidable. It is an anthological sequel for a groundbreaking show that captured lightning in a bottle. Series 1 was so

Suth'n and spooky that any follow-up was doubtless doomed, especially when it abandons what made the first so transcendent: the whiff of the occult.

Instead of Southern Gothic we get Shakespearean LA noir and a much bigger story, as evidenced by the larger A(ish)-list cast. Colin Farrell, Rachel McAdams and Taylor Kitsch all play cops with secrets and pasts in and around the fictional Los Angeles County city, Vinci. Vince Vaughn is local crime kingpin Frank Semyon, attempting to go legitimate with a large land deal on a planned rail corridor. All are drawn together when Semyon's negotiator and corrupt city planner Ben Caspere is murdered. The strands of the tale — which shares DNA with James Ellroy's *L.A. Confidential* novel — loop like tourniquets around each other as the city officials, various gangsters, the cops and their families distil the truth via murder, elite orgies, double-cross and blackmail.

What *TD2* does well are the tense action set pieces — including a monster shootout centerpiece in episode five that



rivals Michael Mann's *Heat* — and the character studies. All the leads relish having complex beings to chew, and Vince Vaughn gives the performance of a career as the gentlemanly bandit Semyon.

The problems begin in the transposition from the South to the West Coast. The Southern poetry so languid and marvellous in S1's dialogue is replaced by a stilted noir. There are lines spoken by Frank and his wife Jordan (Kelly Reilly) reminiscent of David Mamet at his most stagey — think *Spartan* — and sometimes stray perilously close to *The Bold And The Beautiful*. Furthermore the crime at its centre is much more jejune, stripped of the kinky occult madness, it lacks the chilling desperation for the audience, a sticking point considering the first's horrifying, phantasmagorical awfulness.

It's not to say it is not worth your time. Creator Nic Pizzolatto may not have rebottled the lightning, but *True Detective 2* is solid, gutsy telly.

EXTRAS Commentaries, a day-by-day of "The Vinci Massacre" making-of. Cool nugget: after decades of playing cops and soldiers, Colin Farrell had to "dumb down" his gun skills to make dud cop Ray Velcoro convincing. **DANIEL MURPHY**

Top: Frank Semyon (Vince Vaughn) and Ray Velcoro (Colin Farrell) discuss detecting.

Above: Ani Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams).

Doctor Who: Series 9 Part 2

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 13 / RATED M / PRODUCER STEVEN MOFFAT / CAST PETER CAPALDI, JENNA COLEMAN, MAISIE WILLIAMS

DVD BR 

STEP BACK IN TIME



DOES ANYONE STAY dead on *Doctor Who*? It's a reasonable question after the back half of Series 9, which sees two main characters back from the (seemingly permanent) grave. At least the return of UNIT scientist Petronella Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) in the two-part paranoid thriller 'The Zygon Invasion / Inversion' makes sense in an episode full of shifting loyalties and shape-shifting faces. But even in a show that increasingly values emotion over coherent storytelling, the effort made to bring Clara (Jenna Coleman) back after a genuinely moving demise seems more



about claiming she's the best companion ever than the reality of a muddled character rarely used well. But *Who*'s wildly uneven tone means there's plenty of good mixed in the with bad. *Game Of Thrones*'s Maisie Williams's reoccurring role this series as the accidentally

immortal "Me" is a constant delight, and the penultimate episode 'Heaven Sent' — a one-hander focusing entirely on Peter Capaldi — is one of the strongest episodes in years.

EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes.

ANTHONY MORRIS

Phone: "Yeah Doc, Elwood wants his sunnies back."

The X-Files: The Collector's Set

★★★★★

FROM NOW / RATED MA15+ / CREATOR CHRIS CARTER / CAST DAVID DUCHOVNY, GILLIAN ANDERSON, MITCH PILEGGI

BR 

THE TRUTH IS IN A BIG BOX



SPREAD OVER 57 discs, this definitive Blu-ray collection includes all nine series of Chris Carter's seminal sci-fi show plus the two not so good movies

Fight The Future and *I Want To Believe*.

Back in 1993, *The X-Files* sent conspiracy nut-bags into delirium and the stars became the convention-goers crumpet of choice. Fusing mutant mayhem with *Moonlighting*-style 'will they? won't they?' sexual tension, the palpable chemistry between the truth-seeking FBI odd couple, wide-eyed believer Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and sceptic Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), ensured that *The X-Files*



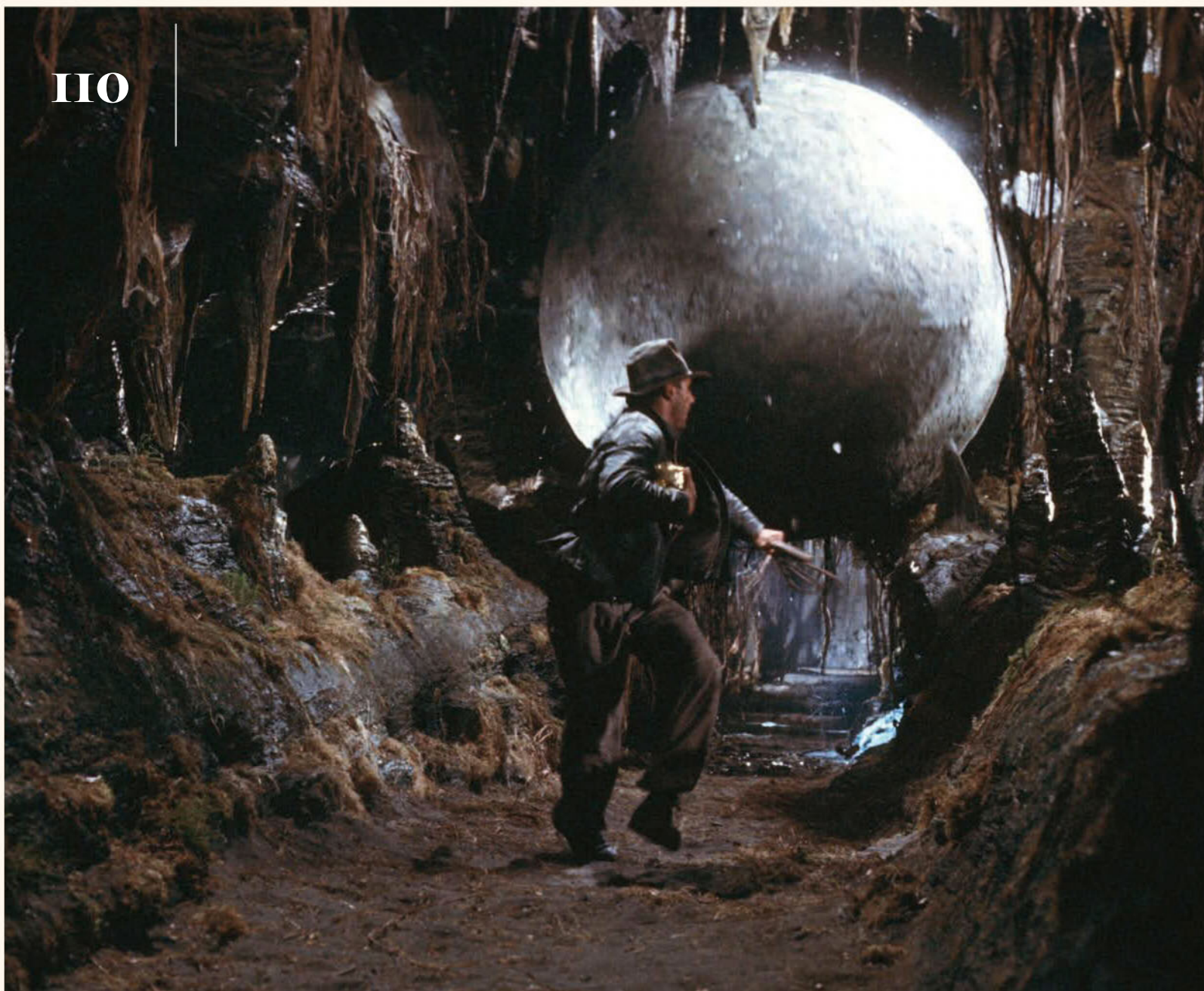
quickly left its cult origins behind to become a mainstream smash. Now, with the prospect of a new series a reality, revisiting the show, all 202 episodes of it in these beautiful high-def transfers, *The X-Files* remains an enthralling, entertaining and downright creepy experience (fourth season episode *Home*, in particular, still shocks). Duchovny and Anderson's performances continue to grow with every viewing, Mulder and Scully's relationship is perfectly played,

giving much needed human conflict as the duo battle sea monsters, vampires and toilet goblins.

The golden age of the golden age of television started here.

EXTRAS Exhaustive. 23 hours of extras! Every series is loaded with extras including commentaries from Carter and his cast and crew, featurettes, documentaries, deleted scenes and more. Plus there is a place holder for the new series. **DAVID MICHAEL BROWN**

Where's the light coming from? The *X-Files* team return to Blu-ray.



Raiders Of The Lost Ark

1981 / RATED PG / DIRECTOR STEVEN SPIELBERG / CAST HARRISON FORD, KAREN ALLEN, PAUL FREEMAN, JOHN RHYS-DAVIES

DVD BR

THE BEARD CALLS "ACTION" ON A CLASSIC

THAT SPIELBERG CAME BACK FROM THE mauling he received over *1941* is remarkable enough. That he came back so quickly — taking just 18 months to put the budget-busting, just-in-profit farce behind him and turn out a film that would hold Paramount's cash-raking record until the 1994 release of *Forrest Gump* — is astonishing. That he did so without any perceptible retreat from the wistfully innocent movie vision that had sustained him thus far, and that had irked *1941*'s critics so violently has the eyes popping and the jaw skimming the carpet in an approximation of one of Tex Avery's cartoon wolves.

That he did so with a 1940s adventure serial homage about a daredevil archaeologist beggars belief. You wouldn't pitch it for all

the cocaine in Hollywood, but Spielberg didn't need to. In as deep a career trough as he was ever again to dig, Steven Spielberg got by with a little help from his friends. Or rather, friend.

In fact, Indiana Jones was the invention of George Lucas, conceived back in 1973 and polished by Philip Kaufman, who introduced the main Ark Of The Covenant plotspring: the source of much subsequent bickering over credits and percentages. Summering with Lucas in Hawaii in 1977, Spielberg helped his old UCLA pal to bat the idea around. Lawrence Kasdan — a young ad agency hotshot recently turned screenwriter — stepped aboard and by the time shooting began on *1941*, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was in presentable shape. Two hundred and 47 days later, with *1941* finally in the can and five times over its provisional budget, it needed to be. Because Spielberg really needed *Raiders*.

Underway in June 1980, the producing Lucas drew the fire and watched the budget (Spielberg's demands for an extra 1000 or so snakes for the Well Of Souls scene was partly met with bicycle inner tubing). Spielberg, relaxed and having a whale of a time, turned in blinding work. This was spectacular set-piece filmmaking, trumping the breathless treachery/boulder/Belloq/Indians/seaplane opening with a seemingly endless litany of "beat that... oh, you have" moments. For a generation who were 10-15 in 1981, *Raiders* instantly became the Platonic Ideal of the adventure movie; from John Williams's stirring *Raiders* march

1 Harrison Ford's adventurer Indiana Jones isn't having a ball.

2 Jones dons the specs in "Professor" mode.

3 Indy and Sallah (John Rhys-Davies) Ark up.

4 Indy and Marion (Karen Allen) turn a blind eye.



“An endless litany of ‘beat that... oh, you have’ moments.”



(“Dat-da-da-daaaah! Dat-da-daaaah”) to Jones/Ford’s smirking, cool-as-a-cucumber smart tough guy who wasn’t afraid to show when the punches truly stung and that sometimes fear can get the better of you (only when snakes slither onto the scene).

Spielberg’s entertainment instincts had returned. Pushing for belly laughs in the duff 1941, he’d come across like the college doofus trying to impress the cool dudes on campus. By comparison, *Raiders*’ humour, though relentless, is a by-product of the storytelling. In one knockout moment, and with comic timing which might have awed Chaplin, Jones faces a scimitar-flourishing Berber, shrugs, pulls his revolver and shoots him dead. Originally storyboarded as a lengthy ding-dong of swordplay and whipwork, the legends are legion as to how Spielberg dreamt it up, some sources alleging that Harrison Ford (it was nearly Tom Selleck — we have CBS-TV and *Magnum PI* to thank for kiboshing that), suffering from a touch of the Cairo Colon, demanded the scene be cut short before he was caught short. And that, of course, it is genius.

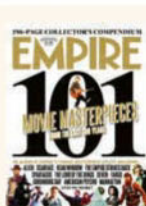
The sheer speed of *Raiders*, its ground-breaking depiction of a sweating hero inclined to smugness but only barely coping with events, its dramatic camerawork and bravura editing: everything conspired to place the audience in the thick of the action and perennially uncertain as to the outcome. Ben Burt — the sound

man who conjured the sizzling travel of the *Star Wars* blasters by going into the middle of the Mojave desert, hitting a telegraph cable with a hammer and recording the other end — excelled himself. Towards the end, as Jones clings with his whip to the axle of a careering Wehrmacht truck, the vehicle itself seems to take on an air of living malevolence. Burt did that by mixing a deafening lion’s roar into the engine noise. His reward: an Academy Special Achievement Award and a directing slot on Lucasfilm’s *Young Indiana Jones* serial of the mid-’90s.

Though some are loathe to call *Raiders* a thoroughbred Spielberg film, they’re just being silly. The shadow of Lucas notwithstanding, it so is. There are Nazis in it. There’s a big old religious metaphor in it. It’s no good at relationships (so “no good” that it doesn’t even bother). The number of filmic references in it would embarrass Brian De Palma. It was, and let’s not be coy about this, globe-buggeringly successful. And of course there was no director Oscar.

Spielberg was back on track, with one and a half million dollars in the bank, plus percentages. Fortune and glory, kid.

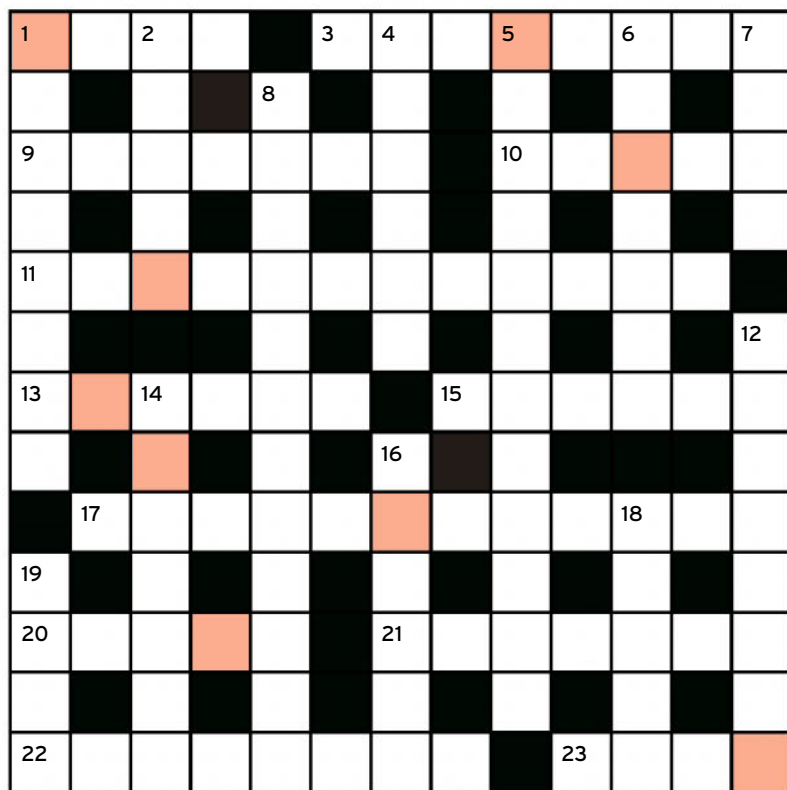
DANNY ECCLESTON



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RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK WILL SCREEN ON FEBRUARY 5 AT EVENT CINEMAS GEORGE ST, SYDNEY, AS PART OF THE “IN THE HOUSE” SERIES. FOR DETAILS AND TICKETS, GO TO [HTTP://BIT.LY/1LZEJUE](http://bit.ly/1LZEJUE)

THE EMPIRE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

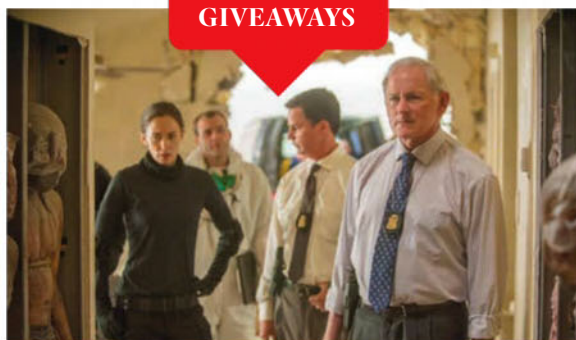
- 1 Pumped by Arnie back in 1977 (4)
- 3 Feline antihero portrayed by Halle Berry in 2004 (8)
- 9 Sandra Bullock and Melissa McCarthy's hot action release (3,4)
- 10 Bernstein discovered amid Ethel Merman (5)
- 11 Dame cast as Maggie Walker in *Last Chance Harvey* (6,6)
- 13 Avengers foe portrayed by James Spader in 2015 (6)
- 15 Hellraiser Peter – Priam in *Troy* (6)
- 17 Experimental filmmaker famed for *Scorpio Rising* (7,5)
- 20 Basketball bonanza that involved Whoopi Goldberg – and Donald Trump! (5)
- 21 Did this 2014 Chris Rock-starrer really go high in the charts? (3,4)
- 22 A 2005 question regarding race relations involving Ashton Kutcher (5,3)
- 23 The title role was played by both Kate Winslet and Judi Dench (4)

DOWN

- 1 This erotic thriller was directed by Jane Campion and co-produced by Nicole Kidman (2,3,3)
- 2 Ryan, or maybe Tatum (5)
- 4 Did this provide Paul Rudd's tiniest role? (3,3)
- 5 Animated Disney film in which John C. Reilly voiced the title character (5,2,5)
- 6 Christopher Nolan's backwards trip – remember? (7)
- 7 Director Ephron discovered in an anorak (4)
- 8 Neil Jordan's remake of Michael Curtiz's 1955 comedy classic (4,2,6)
- 12 Intrepid, like Jeff Bridges in a Peter Weir creation (8)
- 14 It linked Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin and Bart The Bear (3,4)
- 16 Lilo's sometime film partner (6)
- 18 Blaxploitation star Pam (5)
- 19 Simon – though you might think of him as Shaun or even *Star Trek's* Scotty (4)

JANUARY ANSWERS **ACROSS** 7 Fletch, 8 London, 9 Demi, 10 And Mercy, 11 Othello, 13 Fight, 15 Lenny, 17 Cushing, 20 Parental, 21 Nell, 23 Fedora, 24 Twelve. **DOWN** 1 Blue, 2 Strike, 3 Cheadle, 4 Blade, 5 Angeli, 6 Rob Cohen, 12 The Waves, 14 Bullitt, 16 Neeson, 18 Hunter, 19 Ethan, 22 Love. **ANAGRAM** Daniel Craig

GIVEAWAYS



WIN! Sicario on Blu-ray

THRILLERS DON'T GET MORE INTENSE THAN DENIS Villeneuve's fist-clenching tension cranker. With a stellar cast that includes Emily Blunt, Josh Brolin and Benicio Del Toro, *Sicario* twists and turns like a... twisty-turny thing as a government task force tries to bring down the leader of a brutal Mexican drug cartel. We have 10 BDs up for grabs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE THRILLER IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Irrational Man on DVD

SCHOOL'S OUT AS THE LATEST WOODY ALLEN project hits disc with Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone and Parker Posey in tow. Phoenix plays a teacher living on the edge of an existential crisis (it is a Woody Allen film after all). To see what he does to get out of his funk, win one of 10 DVDs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE WOODY ALLEN FILM IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Bone Tomahawk on Blu-ray

THE WESTERN RENAISSANCE STARTS HERE. Kurt Russell and his epic moustache, both soon to be seen in QT's *The Hateful Eight*, star in this horror flick with a difference. To see cowboys battle cannibalistic troglodytes, win one of the 10 BDs we have to win.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE SPAGHETTI WESTERN IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Take Care on DVD

PROVING YOU KNOW WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE when you really need them, comedy romance *Take Care* stars Leslie Bibb as a young woman recovering from a car crash who has no one to look after her except her ex. Hilarity and nursing ensue. We have 10 copies on DVD to give away.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE ROM-COM IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Straight Outta Compton on DVD

WHAT'S UP GANGSTAS? THE N.W.A biopic *Straight Outta Compton* is here so if you want to find out how cool Ice Cube really is, express yourself by answering the question below and you could take home one of 10 DVDs. Word.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC BIOPIC IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Holding The Man on Blu-ray

A BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED ADAPTATION OF Timothy Conigrave's best-selling memoir, the poignant *Holding The Man*, starring Ryan Corr and Craig Stott, will melt the hardest of hearts. Sorry, we've got something in our eye. Sniff. We have 10 copies of this fantastic Aussie flick to win.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE AUSSIE FILM OF 2015 IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Castastrophe on DVD

TEN LUCKY WINNERS WILL BE TAKING HOME A copy of this hilarious new sitcom starring Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney as an odd couple who get together after she falls pregnant following a very brief fling while he is in the UK on business. And Carrie Fisher is in it!



TO WIN, TELL US WHO YOUR FAVOURITE TV COUPLE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! Sinister II on DVD

SHANNYN SOSSAMON STARS AS A YOUNG MOTHER who moves into a rural house with her twin sons. The scary bit? The abode is marked for death. Just like Steven Seagal. To win one of 10 copies of this horror sequel on DVD, just summon up the courage to answer the question below.



TO WIN, TELL US YOUR FAVOURITE HAUNTED HOUSE FILM, AND WHY.

HOW TO ENTER

To win any of these prizes, email us at empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au, write the prize in the subject line, your preferred format if there are both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander *Empire* readers. Entries close February 15 2016. For conditions of entry visit www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms

CAPTION COMPETITION**Eddie The Eagle**

CAST TARON EGERTON, HUGH JACKMAN, CHRISTOPHER WALKEN, TIM MCINNERNY / DIRECTOR DEXTER FLETCHER

CAPTION THE PICTURE ABOVE AND WIN BIG

WIN!

THE STORY OF THE FIRST BRITISH SKI jumper to enter the Winter Olympics is given the uplifting comedy treatment care of *Kingsmen: The Secret Service*'s Taron Egerton and Wolverine himself Hugh Jackman! If you hit the slopes and send us a frightfully witty caption to the picture above, you could win the awesome 17 disc Hammer Horror Collection, featuring such terrifying classics as *The Curse of the Werewolf*, *The Brides Of Dracula*, *Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter*, *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* and many more.



EDDIE THE EAGLE IS OUT APRIL 21.

HOW TO ENTER

In 10 words or less email your caption with the subject February 2015 caption comp to empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au. The winner will be published in the April 2016 edition of *Empire*.

DECEMBER 2015 WINNER

"Dreamworks' remake of *Waterworld* went a bit bear-shaped."

Congratulations Trent Clayton! You take home every episode of *Mad Men* in a snazzy box with The Complete Collection on Blu-ray!



EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

Grizzly Man

"I WILL NOT DIE AT THEIR CLAWS AND PAWS."

SETTING THE SCENE On October 5, 2003, ursine enthusiast Timothy Treadwell was mauled to death by the pack of grizzly bears he had been living with in Alaska. Werner Herzog's acclaimed documentary, by turns funny and chilling, opens with this scene, in which the eccentric Treadwell contemplates his own mortality.

EXT. KATMAI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE — DAY
Timothy Treadwell is narrating his encounter with two grizzly bears.

Timothy: I'm out in the prime cut of the big green. Behind me is Ed and Rowdy, members of an up-and-coming sub-adult gang. They're challenging everything, including me. Goes with the territory.

He jabs his finger into the air.

Timothy: If I show weakness, if I retreat, I may be hurt. I may be killed. I must hold my own if I'm gonna stay within this land. For once there is weakness, they will exploit it, they will take me out, they will decapitate me, they will chop me into bits and pieces. I'm dead.

He glances over his shoulder, looking at the grizzly behind him.

Timothy: But so far, I persevere. Persevere.

He turns back to the camera.

Timothy: Most times I'm a kind warrior out here. Most times, I am, I am gentle. I am like a flower. I'm like, I'm like a fly on the wall, observing, noncommittal, non-invasive in any way. Occasionally

I am challenged. And in that case, the kind warrior must, must, must become a samurai. Must become so, so formidable, so fearless of death, so strong that he will win, he will win. Even the bears will believe that you are more powerful. And in a sense you must be more powerful if you are to survive in this land with the bear. No-one knew that. No-one ever friggin' knew that there are times when my life is on the precipice of death and that these bears *can* bite, they *can* kill. And if I am weak, I go down. I love them with all my heart. I will protect them. I will die for them. But I will not die at their claws and paws. I will fight. I will be strong. I'll be one of them. I will be the master. But still a kind warrior.

Laughing, he blows a kiss at the bear.

Timothy: Love you, Rowdy.

He walks towards the camera.

Timothy: Give it to me, baby. That's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm talking about.

He pauses.

Timothy: I can smell death all over my fingers.

**LIKE
THIS,
WATCH
THIS**



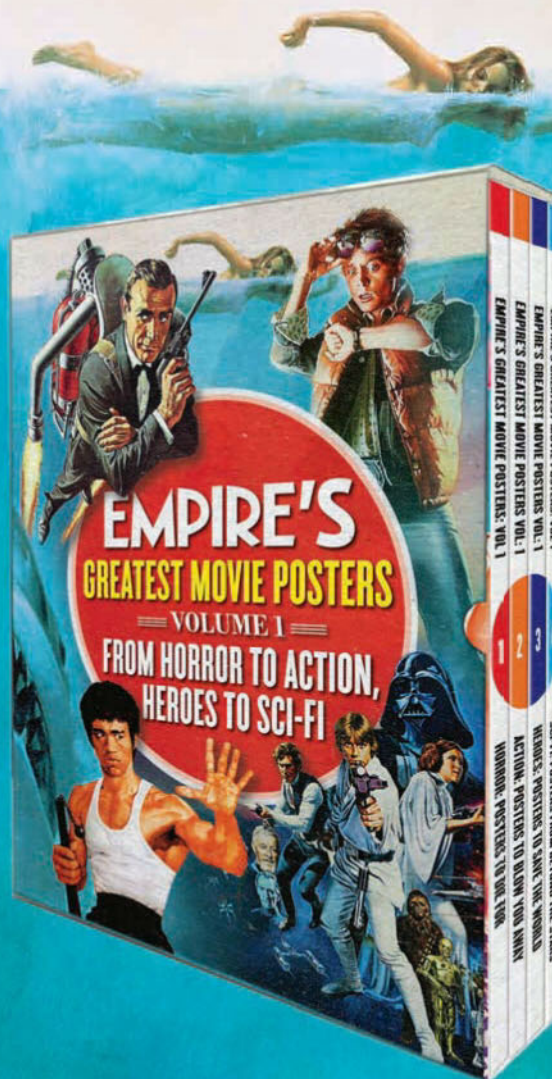
THE EDGE

1997

Alec Baldwin versus Anthony Hopkins versus a giant Kodiak, played by Hollywood veteran Bart The Bear. Oh, and pretty much all three of them are fighting over Elle Macpherson, who plays... a model.

EMPIRE

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UNTIL
SHE
CAUGHT
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THE NIGHT CREW

★★★★★
"FIGHTS, SHOOT-OUTS
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